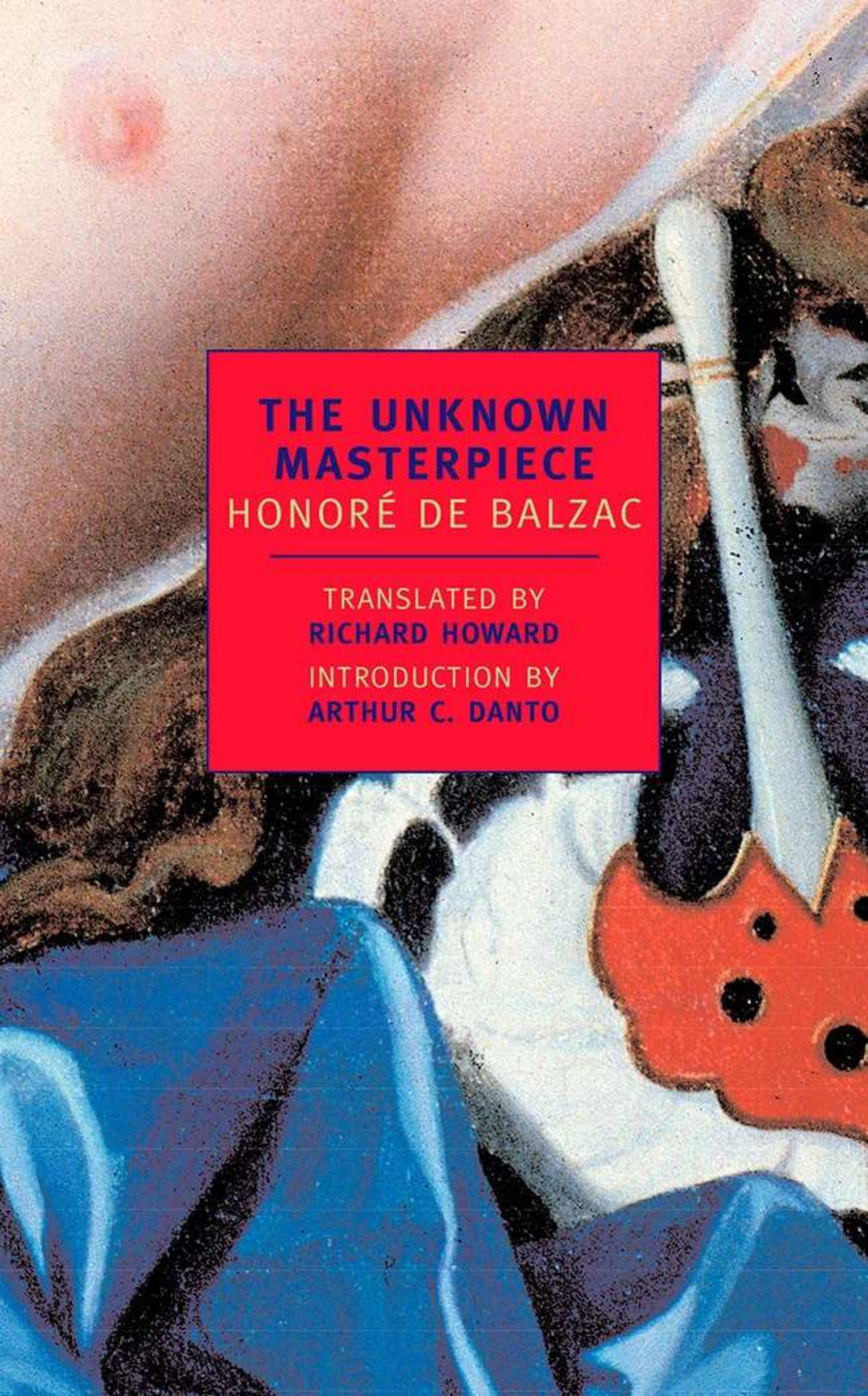
THE UNKNOWN MASTERPIECE
HONORÉ DE BALZAC
TRANSLATED BY
RICHARD HOWARD
INTRODUCTION BY
ARTHUR C. DANTO

NEW YORK REVIEW BOOKS

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HONORÉ DE BALZAC (1799–1850), one of the greatest and most influential of novelists, was born in Tours and educated at the Collège de Vendôme and the Sorbonne. He began his career as a pseudonymous writer of sensational potboilers, before achieving success with a historical novel, *The Chouans*. Balzac then conceived his great work, *La Comédie humaine*, an ongoing series of novels in which he set out to offer a complete picture of contemporary society and manners. Always working under an extraordinary burden of debt, Balzac wrote some eighty-five novels in the course of his last twenty years, including such masterpieces as *Père Goriot*, *Eugénie Grandet*, *Lost Illusions*, and *Cousin Bette*. In 1850, he married Mme. Eveline Hanska, a rich Polish lady with whom he had long conducted an intimate correspondence. Three months later he died.

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The Unknown Masterpiece
and
Gambara

Honoré de Balzac

Translated from the French by
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New York

Contents

Cover
Biographical Notes
Title Page

Introduction

THE UNKNOWN MASTERPIECE

GAMBARA

Copyright and More Information

Introduction

> *I think a man spends his whole lifetime painting one picture or working on one piece of sculpture. The question of stopping is really a decision of moral considerations. To what extent are you intoxicated by the actual act, so that you are beguiled by it? To what extent are you charmed by its inner life? And to what extent do you then really approach the intention or desire that is really outside it? The decision is always made when the piece has something in it that you wanted.*
>
> —Barnett Newman

"The events of human life, be they public or private," Balzac wrote, "are so intimately bound up with architecture, that the majority of observers can reconstruct nations or individuals in the full reality of their behavior, from the remnants of their public monuments or the examination of their domestic remains." The novel in which this passage appears—*The Pursuit of the Absolute*—thus begins with a description of a specific house in a specific street in a specific town: a lodging in the rue de Paris in Douai, "the physiognomy, the interior disposition, and the details of which have, more than any of the other houses, retained the character of the old Flemish buildings, so naively appropriate to the patriarchal mores of that good country." And the action of the novel unfolds along the lines our social intuitions have been prompted by the architecture to anticipate. Here, as elsewhere in his vast work, Balzac sets down, with the precision of a journalistic dispatch, the *coordonnées* of place, time, history, and politics against which his stories are plotted, as a way to give his dreamlike inventions the possibility of human truth.

The sites of Balzac's fictions are nearly always real places, but so transfigured that the house at 7, rue des Grands-Augustins in Paris, where the action of *The Unknown Masterpiece* begins, belongs as much if not more to his great character, the painter Frenhofer, as to Picasso, who took it for his studio in 1937, almost certainly because he believed it to have been where Frenhofer's story was set.[1] And Frenhofer himself is so close to the limits of true artistic creativity as to have become part of the self-image of every artist familiar with him. There is a famous passage in Émile Bernard's recorded conversations with Cézanne, in which the aging master explicitly identifies with Balzac's painter:

> One evening when I was speaking to him about *The Unknown Masterpiece* and of Frenhofer, the hero of Balzac's drama, he got up from the table, planted himself before me, and, striking his chest with his index finger, designated himself—without a word, but through this repeated gesture—as the very person in the story. He was so moved that tears filled his eyes.[2]

Frenhofer is, as Balzac explicitly notes in connection with his musical counterpart, the obsessed composer Gambara, a figure out of E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Tales*. Both stories are niched in that arrondissement of *La Comédie humaine* which he designates *Études philosophiques*—fictional exercises in which "the ravages of thought are depicted." Balzac himself, one might say, is made of the same fabric as his artists—a pilgrim in quest of the Absolute. *La Comédie humaine* was no more realizable as a whole than Frenhofer's painting or Gambara's perfect symphony. To any of these artists we can apply the brilliant witticism with which Jean Cocteau characterized Balzac's friend and admirer, Victor Hugo: that he was a madman who believed he was Victor Hugo. Balzac was a madman who actually lived a life that would strain credulity had he written the story of it as a fiction. We as much believe in Frenhofer—unlike any of Hoffmann's characters—as we believe in Balzac himself as a kind of true impossibility.

It says something about the power of Balzac's fiction that Frenhofer remains more real to us than either of the two historical artists—Nicolas Poussin and Franz Pourbus—who interact with him in *The Unknown Masterpiece*. Or perhaps it is a tribute to the fact that the highly romanticized vision of art and especially of

painting, through which Balzac imagined Frenhofer and his *chef-d'oeuvre*, remains, even in this age of cynicism and deconstruction, the strongest component in our concept of art and certainly our concept of painting, whereas it is all but impossible to see Poussin's austerely intellectual canvases, let alone the late Mannerist compositions of the court painter Franz Pourbus—for whom Balzac employs the gallicized name Porbus[3]—in such terms. They are reimagined by Balzac for the purposes of his story—but Frenhofer has, unlike either of them, become a living myth. Poussin and Pourbus are too locked into the history of art to be successfully reimagined, though it is true that Balzac somewhat transforms them for purposes of his parable.

The story is set in the Left Bank of Paris, on a chill December afternoon in 1612. In art-historical truth, Poussin indeed arrived in Paris in 1612 at the age of eighteen, but though he was to become the greatest French painter of his age, in reality he was hardly the prodigy Balzac depicts, dashing off a drawn copy of Porbus's painting in a matter of minutes, and signing it as an advertisement for himself. According to the leading Poussin expert of the twentieth century, Anthony Blunt, "In an age of virtuosi, [Poussin] was a plodder." His "earliest surviving works show that at the age of thirty he had hardly attained the skill that would have been expected from a youth of eighteen in the academic studios of Rome and Bologna." The Flemish master Franz Pourbus the Younger was in his early forties in 1612, and, as Balzac's story implies, he was exceedingly successful as the leading portraitist of his era and, in particular, as the official portraitist of Marie de Medici, Queen Mother and Regent of France. He introduced into French art the grand manner of Venetian design, which he had mastered during a long residence in Italy, at the Court of Mantua. He was in any case a more considerable artist than Balzac depicts in the character of Porbus, and Poussin in fact owed his own high style in part to Pourbus's example. In 1612, Pourbus was scarcely about to be surpassed in the Queen's artistic favor by Rubens, as Balzac suggests, though in 1621—the year before Pourbus's death—Rubens was to undertake the tremendous cycle of paintings which mythologized the life of Marie de Medici in the gallery of the Luxembourg Palace.

Frenhofer of course is entirely fictitious. But Balzac provides him with a real pedigree as the only student of Mabuse—the nickname of Jan Gossart, the Flemish painter who had died in 1532. Assuming Frenhofer had entered Mabuse's studio at the age of twelve, he would be ninety-two when the story takes place, but still a powerful painter and something of a lover as well. Artistic and erotic powers are crucially linked in Balzac's scheme. Porbus's waning powers are emblematized through the fact that, unlike either Poussin or Frenhofer, he lacks a female companion. He has only a female patron. In an atmosphere in which love and art are the main currencies, worldly power counts for very little.

The Unknown Masterpiece is an allegory of artistic glory and erotic love. The three painters are, so to speak, the spirits of Past, Present, and Future. For all the specifities of time and place, Balzac's story takes place in a poetical setting: "The dim light of the staircase lent a further tinge of the fantastic: as if a canvas by Rembrandt were walking, silent and unframed, through the tenebrous atmosphere that great painter had made his own."[4] In the successive versions of the story, which Balzac revised over the course of more than fifteen years, the character of Frenhofer continues to deepen; by contrast, the two historical figures are frankly presented as stereotypes. Nicolas ("Nick" as the text playfully designates him) is the embodiment of the Bohemian Youth, the Young Man from the Provinces, poor enough that Frenhofer is moved to give him money to buy a good warm coat, and good-looking enough to be the lover of a "mistress of incomparable beauty—not one defect!" as Porbus will panderingly describe her to Frenhofer. Poussin's literary counterpart would have been Rodolphe in *Scènes de la vie de Bohème* by Balzac's friend Henri Murger (which was published a decade after the 1837 version of *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*). If Poussin is the Artist of the Future, Porbus embodies the Present in a wonderfully Balzacian way: an artist who has achieved success in a style soon to be eclipsed by a shift in fashion to that of the Baroque—here embodied by Rubens, for whom Frenhofer expresses such contempt.

Frenhofer's role is to embody the Past, having learned the secrets of the masters. But in fact he is an anachronism, since Balzac depicts him in part as he would one of his own contemporaries. The remarkable passages in which Frenhofer repaints Porbus's picture of Marie Egyptienne disrobing in order to gain her passage to Jerusalem recapitulates what his biographers suggest was Balzac's own experience in sitting for Louis Boulanger's 1837 portrait of him. One chief difference between the first and the final recension of the story consists in Balzac having added a great deal of studio detail in depicting Frenhofer as a painter. These passages, according to one scholar, "Take up two fifths of the first part and over one fourth of the entire story...the most important of them shows him correcting Porbus' painting according to his own principles." These changes, based presumably on Balzac's observations, are what give substance to what might otherwise be mere parable. And they illustrate how he uses his knowledge of reality as ballast for his imagination. In *Lost Illusions*, Balzac composed a portrait of a writer which so draws upon the detailed knowledge of royalties, proofs, advertising, plagiarism, and the kind of practical knowledge which only a

writer of his day and age could have possessed that it is fact and fiction at once.

It is difficult to identify an actual artist from the 1830s whose painting exemplifies the maxims implied in Frenhofer's discourse. The great painters of the age would have been Ingres and Delacroix, whose *Liberty Leading the People* provided the main buzz in the Salon of 1831, when *The Unknown Masterpiece* was first published in the periodical *L'Artiste*. But the *philosophy* of painting would have been fairly standard for anyone who had internalized the Romantic image of an artist. It would have to have been someone who painted the way Victor Hugo wrote. We can get a pretty fair sense of the Frenhoferian spirit from the following passage by John Ruskin, a serious draftsman and the great disciple of Turner. Ruskin is describing an episode in which he drew an aspen near Fontainebleau in 1842:

> Languidly, but not idly, I began to draw it; and as I drew, the languor passed away. The beautiful lines insisted on being traced,—without weariness. More and more beautiful they became, as each rose out of the rest, and took its place in the air. With wonder increasing every instant, I saw that they "composed" themselves, by finer laws than any known of men. At last the tree was there, and everything I had thought before about trees, nowhere.

Notice the way the tree bodies itself forth "in the air." It is the "air" that makes the difference between Frenhofer's work and Porbus's. "The air is so real you can no longer distinguish it from the air around yourselves," Frenhofer boasts. "There's no air between that arm and the background," he says in criticism of Porbus's figure. "You can see she's pasted on the canvas—you could never walk around her. She's a flat silhouette, a cutout who could never turn around or change position."[5]

Bringing reality to life has at once been the problem and promise of pictorial art. The history of painting as *problem* has in effect been a history of progress—the triumph over visual appearance, which is the overarching theme of Giorgio Vasari's great *Lives of the most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, first published in 1550; and more recently of Ernst Gombrich's *Art and Illusion*. For Vasari, as for Balzac's trinity of artists, that history culminates in Raphael. Thus Frenhofer removes his black velvet cap "to express his respect for this monarch of art." It is in any case a history of technical breakthroughs: perspective, chiaroscuro, foreshortening, anatomical understanding, physiognomy, optics, and color theory—the things that were taught in the academies, and which the real Poussin had to struggle so to master. When Frenhofer explains why his painting is such a triumph, his speech is like boilerplate from a painter's manual of the seventeenth century: "Some of these shadows cost me a lot of hard work.... I've managed to capture the truth of light and to combine it with the gleaming whiteness of the highlights, and...by an opposite effort, by smoothing the ridges and textures of the paint itself and...by submerging them in half-tones, have eliminated the very notion of drawing."

All of this could be taught and learned. But something else had entered the concept of art as early as the late eighteenth century, in the writing of Kant, namely, the concept of the creative genius: "a talent," Kant writes, "for producing that for which no definite rule can be given." Hence the genius "does not know himself how he has come by his ideas; and he has not the power to devise the like at pleasure, or in accordance with a plan, and to communicate it to others in precepts that will enable them to produce similar products." "Let's not analyze it," Frenhofer says. "It would only drive you to despair."

Frenhofer means that there are no rules. "It is not the mission of art to copy nature"—for which rules can be stated or mechanisms like the camera be devised—"but to express it!" And this then requires genius. Geniuses, Ruskin wrote, "are more instinctive and less reasonable than other people." He is referring to what happens when he, for example, draws a tree, and something beyond knowledge takes over: "I don't think myself a great genius—but I believe I have genius." Frenhofer puts it in his own way: "Artists aren't mere imitators, they're poets!" Somewhat inconsistently, Frenhofer appears to have imagined, in connection with the climactic work to which he devoted so many years, that knowledge really could do the work of genius—that knowledge, astutely applied, could not merely conquer appearance but conquer reality, and bring the subject literally to life. But Frenhofer, though unquestionably meant to be seen by us as a genius, aspires to something greater by far than that. He wants to perform magic.

This connects with the *promise* of pictorial art, which has a very different history from that of painterly progress. It is in effect a history of magic and of miracle. It is a history as well of superstition and of fear. In his brilliant study *Likeness and Presence*, the art historian Hans Belting has written an astonishing history of the devotional image in early Christian art. The early Church had no interest in pictures that were produced by the exercise of pictorial skills. It was rather interested in images that materialized without the intervention of an artist at all—the way the face of Jesus was miraculously imprinted on Veronica's veil, or Christ's tortured body on the Shroud of Turin. The Church worshiped Saint Luke's portrait of the Holy Virgin because it was believed that the Virgin herself magically formed her self-image on Luke's panel. There was no interest whatever in aesthetics or in artistic virtuosity. Images, when authentic, were like

relics: the saint was believed to be embodied in his or her icons, and could be prayed to for benign interventions. We still hear about wonder-working Virgins and *Sacri Bambini*. These are images that have no reference to museums of fine art or to connoisseurship or art appreciation, nor do they belong in collections. Stories about them appear in the Metro sections of newspapers, but not in the sections devoted to culture.

From the perspective of magic, *every* image has the possibility of coming to life, and perhaps the first images ever drawn, however crudely executed, were viewed with an awe that still remains a disposition of the most primitive regions of the human brain. This is why images have been forbidden in so many of the great religions of the world, and why they have been destroyed in the name of iconoclasm. It is why Plato was afraid of art, and drove artists from his Republic. History and literature are filled with legends of images that come to life (think of the portrait of Dorian Gray). Mythical artists like "Master Pygmalion" have been envied and emulated by those with Frenhoferian ambitions. Pygmalion fulfilled the dream that artists can turn their effigies into real beings. By carving and polishing, his statue came to life! "You're in the presence of a woman. And you're still looking for a picture," Frenhofer tells his stupefied colleagues, who are unable to see either—who see only a "wall of paint." And we are left in the end wondering if the old painter has lost his mind or the younger painters have lost their eyes.

I want to respond to this in a moment, but I must first point out a third history, interwoven with the other two, as it is in Balzac's story. In this history, there are certain parallels between looking at a picture and looking at a woman—particularly at a woman's nakedness if one happens to be a man. There are traditions in which it is regarded as dangerous, or even lethal, for a man to see a woman's genital area. But that aura extends, in certain cultures, to all parts of a woman's body, which must be veiled to protect her from the gaze of males—and males from the sight of unveiled women! Balzac allows us to infer that in Frenhofer's painting, his mistress, Catherine Lescault—who is further described in all but the final version of the story as the courtesan known as *La Belle noiseuse[6]*—is depicted naked. The artist's extreme reluctance to allow anyone to look at his painting must mean that she is shown nude, so that seeing the picture is equivalent to seeing Catherine herself naked. Even in fairly recent memory, when nude photographs of the singer Madonna were printed in *Playboy*, it was at first felt that this must be an extreme embarrassment to her and, at the very least, an invasion of her privacy. There are real-life scenarios in which possessing nude photographs of a woman would give someone the power to blackmail her.

Frenhofer will finally permit his painting to be viewed only because this is the price he has to pay for being able to complete it. He evidently cannot complete it until he finds the right model: "I've made up my mind to travel—I'm off to Greece, to Turkey, even Asia, to look for a model." One wonders what has happened to the original model, Catherine Lescault herself. Perhaps she is no longer as beautiful as she once was, which is what happens to the model in Henry James's later story "The Madonna of the Future," in which the painter waits for too many years to execute his great painting.[7] In fact, I believe there is a more natural explanation, but in any case Porbus tells him that Poussin's mistress, Gillette, is of an incomparable beauty. And he tempts the old painter with an irresistible bargain: in exchange for allowing him to use Gillette as the needed model, he must permit Poussin and himself to see *La Belle noiseuse*. There is thus a symbolic exchange of women. Poussin and Porbus are allowed to see Catherine Lescault, in exchange for Frenhofer being allowed to see Gillette naked. Since Gillette is required to strip, we know that Catherine herself is naked in Frenhofer's painting, which explains why Frenhofer kept his painting of her veiled.

In terms of their values, both men have made an immense sacrifice for the sake of art. It is as if only something of a magic potency as great as that possessed by women (or at least by beautiful women) is sufficient to transfigure a picture into reality. Small wonder feminists have found reason to question the Male Gaze! Small wonder Gillette (as if posing for a canvas by Delacroix) "stood before him in the innocent posture of a terrified Circassian girl carried off by brigands to some slave dealer." How desperately Mary needed to be in Jerusalem, in the scene depicted by Porbus, can be measured by the fact that the boatman is given the inestimable privilege of seeing her bared breasts. Small wonder Frenhofer's main criticism of Porbus's picture is that "everything's wrong" in the way in which he painted Mary's bosom: the painting of the breasts should be as compelling as the breasts themselves.

From the story's perspective, of course, the gaze does not make objects of women, as feminist theory insists. Rather, the story regards the bare female body as of so high a potency that it verges on numinousness. It is to be seen only by a man who occupies the position of the bridegroom. If it should be seen by anyone else, it loses its tremendous value entirely. The woman is cheapened beyond recovery. This is why modesty was once so exalted a feminine virtue. This is something Gillette completely understands. She has no choice but to hate her lover for having allowed this to happen: "Kill me! I'd be vile to love you still—you fill me with contempt."[8] Notice that we are still talking about visual perception: there is no

question of Frenhofer having made love to Gillette, and, needless to say, no question of carnal congress between the two other artists and the *portrait* of Catherine Lescault! The symbolic equivalence the story establishes between seeing a woman's exposed body and seeing a work of art is an effort on the part of a Romantic writer to find something as valuable as art itself—something that money cannot buy, for a woman's nakedness is without value if it is bought. We get, in brief, a value scheme in which a kind of Taliban attitude toward female flesh is rendered equivalent to a Romantic's adoration of art as the supreme value of life.

The sequestration of women behind veils is of a piece with the hiddenness of art Walter Benjamin appeals to in order to account for art's aura. The publicity of the museum, in which everything is there to be looked at, is like the parade of women at the Folies Bergères, their nakedness stripped of its awesomeness. What makes Frenhofer so difficult for us to understand is that he fuses the mystery of female flesh with the magic of the work of art. But this fusion works only if it is a portrait of a woman the artist actually loves, whether or not it actually shows her naked. The story could hardly have worked had Frenhofer been painting fruit all that time like Cézanne! Given the intensity of the fused entity, it is hardly matter for amazement that the picture cannot live up to expectations. Of course the two other artists see, relative to what they have been led to expect, nothing. If all it is is a painting—a mere *painting*—well, it might just as well be what the mere human eye makes out: "a mass of strange lines forming a wall of paint" with an incongruously "living foot... [which] appeared there like the torso of some Parian Venus rising out of the ruins of a city burned to ashes."[9] If painting has lost its promise, artists have lost their power—so what's the point of art? And what's the point of going on painting if the best you can hope for is merely to make pictures?

That may be good enough for Poussin, who at the end of life could say, complacently, "*Je n'ai rien négligé*"—"I have neglected nothing." It had to be enough for Porbus, who was after all the favorite painter of a woman to whom he presumably would not have been united otherwise than as an external portraitist. It was not enough for Frenhofer, whose vision of art was as mystical as that of Balzac. It was not unless solving the problems of painting—which he had done—was the means to securing the mythic promise of painting, at which he necessarily failed: the transformation of a painted woman into a real one. In my view that failure explains why he burned all his paintings and then died. And it explains, I think, why Catherine Lescault was unavailable to him as a model. She was dead, and the only way she could be returned to life was through painting. He could not finish the painting since he could not re-create life. He saw what he had achieved as of a very different order of failure than what Poussin and Porbus saw. As an afterthought, one might conjecture that when it was widely seen that Frenhofer's failure was inescapable, due to an inherent limitation on realism, Modernism was ready to begin. Indeed, it is irresistible to see that wall of paint, crisscrossed with lines and with the realistic fragment of a woman's foot, as the first truly Modernist work!

But in what sense is *La Belle noiseuse*—which we may as well consider the work's title—a masterpiece? And in what sense is it unknown? It could not have been known, in 1612, as a Modernist masterpiece. The concept did not exist. Neither, for that matter, did the concept of Mannerism exist. Both of these were stylistic terms, devised by art historians in the twentieth century, to designate bodies of work with certain affinities to one another. Modernism is sometimes thought to have begun with Manet, and Manet is a good case to consider here, since his work was radically misperceived in its time, and his masterpiece, *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, relegated to the Salon des refusés, where it was jeered at by an outraged public. It was an "unknown masterpiece" in the sense that, though a masterpiece, few at the time would have recognized it as such. Ruskin wrote: "I am fond of standing by a bright Turner in the Academy, to listen to the unintentional compliments of the crowd—'What a glaring thing!' 'I declare I can't look at it!' 'Don't it hurt your eyes!'" I myself once overheard someone scoffing at the Turners in the Tate, saying, "Whoever told him he could paint?" Turner's works are still not seen by everyone as the masterpieces they are. In the context of Balzac's story, the term *inconnu* means "unrecognized."

It might seem difficult to suppose that painters as gifted as Poussin and Porbus could fail to recognize a masterpiece when they see one, but that is the story of art. In 1612, Poussin's paradigm was the School of Fontainebleau. For Pourbus, Titian set the criterion for painterly excellence. Imagine that they had been presented with one of Cézanne's masterpieces, or de Kooning's *Woman I*, or Pollock's *Blue Poles*. Nothing in their experience would have prepared them to see these as art at all. They would have looked to them like ruined canvas, smeared over by a madman or an animal. Frenhofer himself could hardly have recognized *La Belle noiseuse* as a masterpiece. We would want to reverse his speech, saying to him, "You're in the presence of a painting. But you're still looking for a woman." It would have been of no interest to him whatever to learn that he was ahead of his time, "The First Modernist." He is not interested in art history. He is interested in the power of images to come to life. Even if it is a great painting, it has, from the perspective of magic, to be a bleak failure.

Under the auspices of Balzac's Romanticism, a great work of art was equivalent in value to the body of a

beloved woman. And if no one could see its greatness, that is what one must expect. Greatness in art is disclosed in time, as the body of the woman is revealed to the rightful eye of love.

—ARTHUR C. DANTO

[1] In Balzac's novel, of course, it is the studio of the painter François Porbus; Frenhofer's is "near the Pont St. Michel," a few streets away, near where Matisse, himself an admirer of Frenhofer, was to have a studio on the Quai St. Michel through the 1920s. Picasso executed a suite of etchings based on *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* in 1927 for the dealer Ambroise Vollard, who published them in 1931 to mark the centenary of the novel. His own masterpiece, *Guernica*, was painted in the rue des Grands-Augustins.

[2] In an interview with J. Gasquet, Cézanne makes the same identification, somewhat less emotively. He describes the way his eyes remain so attached to the painting he is working on that it feels as if they might bleed. "Am I not somewhat crazy? Fixated on my painting [like] Frenhofer?"

[3] In order to avoid confusion, I shall use "Pourbus" to refer to the actual painter, and "Porbus" to refer to Balzac's somewhat fictionalized character based on Pourbus.

[4] In a kind of graphic footnote to *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*—Plate 36 of the so-called Vollard Suite of 1934—Picasso depicts what we may suppose is Frenhofer as Rembrandt. He showed the print to his mistress, Françoise Gilot, who lived with him in the rue des Grands-Augustins. Gilot recalls him saying, "You see this truculent character here, with the curly hair and moustache? That's Rembrandt. Or maybe Balzac; I'm not sure." Picasso was considerably older than Gilot, and very mindful of the disparity in age. What is striking is that Frenhofer-Rembrandt-Balzac-Picasso is evidently turned into a painting. He holds palette and brushes with one hand, and with the other he reaches out of the picture to hold hands with his young and achingly beautiful model. Artist and woman thus change places: in Balzac's story, the woman is in the picture and the artist is outside it; in Picasso's print, the painter is in the picture and the woman is outside. But they retain the kind of physical contact Frenhofer—and perhaps Balzac and Picasso—dreamt of. Though still a lover, Frenhofer may be too old for any more strenuous contact than holding hands, the way "Freno" in the film *La Belle noiseuse*—based on Balzac's story—lies chastely beside his mistress, holding hands, when the artistic-erotic renewal he had hoped for fails to materialize.

[5] The Realist painter, Gustav Courbet, is reported to have said, regarding the figure of Olympia in Manet's eponymous painting, "It's flat, it isn't modeled; it's like the Queen of Hearts after a bath." I had always taken this as a singular witticism, but Frenhofer's speech—written by Balzac nearly three decades before Manet's controversial work was painted—makes me believe that it must have been a standard put-down in studio crits at the time. Had Porbus not felt such great veneration for Frenhofer, he might have responded as Manet himself did: "Courbet bores us in the end with his modeling: his ideal is a billiard ball."

[6] The name translates roughly into "The Beautiful Pain in the Ass." Intuitively, it sounds like someone's real nickname, and I could not help but feel that Catherine Lescault was a historical person. In the film *La Belle noiseuse*, the modern-day Frenhofer mentions a book about her. So far as I have been able to determine, however, she is entirely fictional, nickname and all. Richard Howard's translation follows Balzac's final version of *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* by omitting the name *La Belle noiseuse*.

[7] James's story is sometimes said to be based on Balzac's. Since in none of the five essays he wrote on Balzac does he mention, let alone discuss, the *Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*, one is almost obliged to believe that he was somehow suppressing the influence. At least certain current views of literary influence would say that Balzac's story must be what James's is about!

[8] When Fernande Olivier moved in with Picasso in 1905, he demanded that she stop modeling. He even sought to lock her up when he was away from the studio.

[9]The celebrated "wall of paint"—*une muraille de peinture*—which Poussin sees instead of the "woman lying on a velvet coverlet, her bed surrounded by draperies, and at her side a golden tripod exhaling incense" he had expected from Frenhofer's exultant description of his masterpiece, was not a thinkable misadventure in seventeenth-century studio practice. "Paints were expensive in those days," Balzac correctly observes, even for an artist as rich as Frenhofer. Only in the twentieth century, with Monet's *Water Lilies* or the Abstract Expressionist canvases of Pollock or de Kooning, could a painting have been botched through that kind of material excess. In Balzac's day, artists' pigments were available in relatively inexpensive tubes, and this made possible the direct approach to painting that Romanticism required. When Frenhofer complains about the pigments in Porbus's studio, he is speaking like someone who takes the art supply store as a given.

THE UNKNOWN MASTERPIECE

TO A LORD
1845.

1. Gillette

On a cold December morning of the year 1612, a young man whose clothes looked threadbare was walking back and forth in front of a house in the rue des Grands-Augustins, in Paris. After pacing this street for some time as irresolutely as a lover shy about keeping a tryst with his first mistress, however obliging she may be, he finally crossed the threshold and inquired if Maître François Porbus was at home. Receiving an affirmative answer from an old woman sweeping the entrance hall, the young man slowly mounted the spiral staircase, stopping on each step like a new courtier uncertain of the king's reception. At the top, he stood on the landing another moment, hesitating to lift the grotesque knocker which embellished the door of the studio where Henri IV's court painter, to whom Marie de Médicis now preferred Rubens, was doubtless at work. The young man was experiencing that profound emotion which has stirred the hearts of all great artists when, in the prime of youth and their love of art, they approach a man of genius or stand in the presence of a masterpiece. There is a first bloom in all human feelings, the result of a noble enthusiasm which gradually fades till happiness is no more than a memory, glory a lie. Among such fragile sentiments, none so resembles love as the youthful passion of an artist first suffering that delicious torture which will be his destiny of glory and of woe, a passion brimming with boldness and fear, vague hopes and inevitable frustrations. The youth who, short of cash but long on talent, fails to tremble upon first encountering a master, must always lack at least one heartstring, some sensitivity in his brushstroke, a certain poetic expressiveness. There may be conceited boasters prematurely convinced that the future is theirs, but only fools believe them. In this regard, the young stranger seemed to possess true merit, if talent is to be measured by that initial shyness and that indefinable humility which a man destined for glory is likely to lose in the exercise of his art, as a pretty woman loses hers in the stratagems of coquetry. The habit of triumph diminishes doubt, and humility may be a kind of doubt.

Beset by poverty and amazed at this moment by his own presumption, the poor neophyte would never have entered the studio of the painter, to whom we owe the admirable portrait of Henri IV, had it not been for an extraordinary favor granted by chance. An old man was coming up the stairs behind him; from the strangeness of this person's garments, the splendor of his lace neckwear, and the awe-inspiring confidence of his gait, the youth assumed him to be either the painter's friend or his patron. He moved aside on the landing and studied the man attentively as he passed, hoping to recognize an artist's good nature or an art lover's obliging disposition; but perceived instead something diabolical in the man, that je ne sais quoi so attractive to artists. Imagine a bulging forehead sloping down to a tiny squashed turned-up nose like Rabelais's or Socrates'; smiling wrinkled lips, a short chin held high and adorned with a gray beard trimmed to a point; sea-green eyes apparently dimmed by age, yet which, by the pupils' contrast with the pearly whites they floated in, must have cast compelling glances in the throes of anger or enthusiasm. Moreover the entire countenance was singularly wizened by the debilities of age and still more by those thoughts which exhaust body and soul alike. No lashes remained on the eyelids, and above the deep sockets only tufts of eyebrows were to be seen. Set such a head upon a weak and puny body, swathe it in extravagant curlicues of immaculate lace, drape a heavy gold chain over the black doublet beneath, and you will have an imperfect image of this personage to whom the dim light of the staircase lent a further tinge of the fantastic: as if a canvas by Rembrandt were walking, silent and unframed, through the tenebrous atmosphere that great painter has made his own. The old creature gave the youth a glance of great sagacity, knocked three times on the door, and said to the sickly looking man of about forty who came to open it: "Good day, maître."

Porbus, bowing respectfully, admitted the youth as well, supposing he had been brought by the old man, and paid little heed to him, for the neophyte remained under the spell that must beguile any born painter at the sight of his first real studio, in which are revealed some of the art's material operations. A skylight illuminated the master's studio; falling directly on the canvas fastened to the easel and as yet marked by only three or four strokes of white paint, daylight failed to penetrate the dark corners of this huge room, though stray reflections in the gloom picked out a silvery gleam on a suit of armor hanging on the wall, suddenly glistened on the carved cornice of a venerable sideboard holding odd pieces of crockery, or spangled points of light upon the coarse texture of some old brocaded draperies lying in broken folds. Plaster lay-figures, limbs and bodies of classical goddesses lovingly polished by the kiss of centuries, littered shelves and console tables. Countless sketches, studies in three colors of crayon, red chalk, or pen-and-ink,

covered the walls up to the ceiling. Boxes of paint in powder and tubes, jars of oil and turpentine, and a series of overturned stools left only a narrow path by which to reach the aureole cast by the skylight around Porbus's pale face and the strange visitor's ivory cranium. The youth's attention was soon entirely absorbed by a picture which, in that age of disorder and upheavals, had already become famous and was often visited by several of those fanatics to whom we owe the preservation of the sacred fire in evil times. This lovely canvas portrayed a Mary of Egypt undressing in order to pay her passage to Jerusalem. Marie de Médicis, for whom it was painted, would sell this masterpiece in the days of her destitution.

"I like your saint," the old man said to Porbus, "and I'd give you ten gold écus for her over and above what the queen's paying, but the devil take me if I'll bid against her!"

"You think it's good?"

The old man sniffed. "Good?... Yes and no. Your lady is assembled nicely enough, but she's not alive. You people think you've done it all once you've drawn a body correctly and put everything where it belongs, according to the laws of anatomy! You fill in your outline with flesh tones mixed in advance on your palette, carefully keeping one side darker than the other, and because you glance now and then at a naked woman standing on a table, you think you're copying nature—you call yourselves painters and suppose you've stolen God's secrets! ...Brrr! A man's not a great poet just because he knows a little grammar and doesn't violate usage! Look at your saint, Porbus! At first glance she seems quite admirable, but look again and you can see she's pasted on the canvas—you could never walk around her. She's a flat silhouette, a cutout who could never turn around or change position. There's no air between that arm and the background; no space, no depth, yet the thing's in perfect perspective and the shading correctly observed; for all your praiseworthy efforts, I could never believe this splendid body was animated by the breath of life. If I were to put my hand on that breast, firm and round as it is, it would feel as cold as marble! No, my friend, blood has never flowed under that ivory skin, the veins don't weave their mesh of crimson dew beneath those transparent temples and that fragrant bosom. Right here there's something like a pulse, but over here it's motionless: life is at grips with death in every pore. Here it's a woman, there a statue, and everywhere else a corpse. Your creation's unfinished. You've managed to put only part of your soul into your precious work. Prometheus's torch has gone out more than once in your hands, and lots of places in your picture are untouched by the divine fire."

"But why has this happened, maître?" Porbus asked the old man deferentially, while the youth with difficulty repressed a strong desire to strike him.

"Ah, there we have it!" the ancient creature exclaimed. "You've wavered between two systems—between drawing and color, between the meticulous phlegm and stern resolve of the old German masters and the dazzling ardor and happy abundance of the Italians. You've tried to imitate Holbein and Titian, or Dürer and Veronese, at the same time. It was certainly a magnificent ambition, but what's happened? You've achieved neither the severe charm of the Germans' dry outlines nor the deceptive illusions of the southerners' chiaroscuro. Over here, like molten bronze cracking the mold, your rich high colors à la Titian have exploded the austere Dürer contours you poured them into. While here, the lineaments have resisted and throttled the splendid excesses of the Venetian's palette. Your figure's neither perfectly drawn nor perfectly painted, and everywhere betrays the traces of this unfortunate vacillation. If you didn't feel your inspiration was strong enough to fuse these rival styles, you should have confined yourself to one or the other, to achieve that unity which simulates one of the conditions of life. Your truth is all in the interior parts—your contours are false, they fail to encircle the limbs or suggest there is something behind them... Now here there's truth," the old man said, pointing to the saint's throat, "and here," he continued, indicating the place on the canvas where the shoulder ended. "But here"—returning to the center of her bosom—"everything's wrong. Let's not analyze it; it would only drive you to despair." The old man sat down on a stool, rested his chin on his hands, and fell silent.

"Maître," Porbus told him, "I did study that breast from the model; but, alas for us, certain effects which are true in nature cease to be lifelike on canvas..."

"It's not the mission of art to copy nature, but to express it! Remember, artists aren't mere imitators, they're poets!" the old man exclaimed, interrupting Porbus with a despotic gesture. "Otherwise a sculptor would be set free from all his labors by taking a cast of his model! Well, just try casting your mistress's hand and setting it down in front of you: you'll see a horrible corpse utterly unlike the original, and you'll be forced to rely on the chisel of a man who, without copying it exactly, can represent its movement and its life. It's our task to seize the physiognomy, the spirit, the soul of our models, whether objects or living beings. Effects! Effects! But they're just the accidents of life, not life itself. A hand—to continue with my example—a hand isn't just attached to an arm, and that arm to a body; no, it expresses and continues an idea that must be seized and rendered. Neither painter, nor poet, nor sculptor can separate effect from cause, they're invincibly united! That's your real struggle! Many painters succeed instinctively, without ever

knowing this theme of art. You draw a woman, but you don't see her! That's not the way to penetrate nature's secrets. With no thought on your part, your hand reproduces the model you've copied in your life-drawing class. You don't delve deeply enough into the intimacies of form. You don't pursue them with sufficient love and perseverance in all their disguises and evasions. Beauty is something difficult and austere which can't be captured that way: you must bide your time, lie in wait, seize it, and hug it close with all your might in order to make it yield. Form's a Proteus much more elusive and resourceful than the one in the myth—only after a long struggle can you compel it to reveal its true aspect. Artists like you are satisfied with the first likeness it yields, or at most the second or third; that's not the way this victory is won! The victorious painter is never deceived by all those subterfuges, he perseveres until nature's forced to show herself stark naked, in her true spirit. That was Raphael's way," the old man said, removing his black velvet cap to express his respect for this monarch of art. "His supremacy's due to that intimate sense which apparently seeks to break Form. In Raphael's figures, Form is what it is in all of us: an intermediary for the communication of ideas and sensations, a vast poetry! Each figure is a world, a portrait whose model has appeared in a sublime vision, colored by light, drawn by an inner voice, examined by a celestial hand which has revealed the sources of expression in an entire existence. You people make lovely gowns of flesh for your women, elegant draperies of hair, but where's the blood which creates peace or passion, which causes particular effects? Your saint's a brunette, yet *this*, my poor Porbus, this belongs to a blonde! And so your figures are tinted phantoms you parade before our eyes, and you call that painting, you call that art! Because you've made something that looks more like a woman than a house, you think you've achieved your goal, and because you no longer need to scribble under your figures *currus venustus* or *pulcher homo*, like the earliest painters, you now suppose you're wonderful artists! Ha, ha! Not so fast, my brave friends: forests of pencils and acres of canvas must be used up before you're there. Of course, of course! A woman tilts her head this way, she holds her skirt like that, her eyes melt with a look of submissive sweetness, the shadow of her lashes trembles just so on her cheeks! That's it—and that's not it. What's lacking? A trifle that's nothing at all, yet a nothing that's everything. You've got the appearance of life, but you don't express its overflowing abundance, that je ne sais quoi which might even be the soul, floating like a cloud over the envelope of flesh. You know, that bloom of life that Titian and Raphael caught. Starting from where you've left off, some excellent painting may be done; but you exhaust yourself too soon. The crowd admires, and the true connoisseur smiles. Oh Mabuse, Oh my master!" added this singular creature, "what a thief you are, taking life with you when you left us!— All the same," he interrupted himself, "your painting's worth more than the daubs of that imposter Rubens with his mountains of Flemish meat sprinkled with vermilion, his waves of auburn hair, and his clashing colors. At least here you have color, and feeling, and drawing, the three essentials of art!"

"But that saint is sublime, my dear sir!" the youth exclaimed loudly, emerging from his deep reverie. "Those two figures, Mary and the boatman, have a delicacy of purpose quite beyond the Italian painters—I can't think of a single one who could have invented the boatman's hesitation."

"Does this young fool belong to you?" Porbus asked the old man.

"Apologies, maître: forgive my boldness," the youth answered, blushing. "I'm a nobody, an ignorant dauber just arrived in this city, which I know to be the fount of all knowledge."

"Then get to work!" Porbus ordered, handing him a red crayon and a sheet of paper.

The unknown youth nimbly copied the figure of Mary of Egypt.

"Oh ho!" the old man exclaimed. "Your name?"

The youth wrote "Nicolas Poussin" under his drawing.

"Not bad for a beginner, not bad at all," observed the singular creature who had been lecturing so wildly. "I see we can talk painting in your presence. I don't blame you for admiring Porbus's saint. The world accounts her a masterpiece, and only the initiates of art's secrets can discover her sins. But since you're worthy of the lesson, and capable of understanding it, I'm going to show you how little it would take to make this a work...of art! Be all eyes, and give me your undivided attention: such an opportunity to learn something may never come again. Your palette, Porbus!"

Porbus went to get a palette and brushes. The little old man rolled up his sleeves with an abrupt convulsive gesture and thrust his thumb into the splotched, paint-laden palette Porbus handed him; then he virtually snatched a handful of brushes of all sizes, and his pointed beard quivered with the menacing exertions corresponding to the itch of an ardent imagination. Loading his brush, he growled between his teeth, "Paints like this deserve to be tossed out the window, along with the fool who mixed them—nauseating, how crude and false they are! Who could paint with these?" Then, with feverish energy he dipped the tip of his brush in each gob of paint, covering the whole spectrum faster than a church organist runs up and down his keyboard for the Easter *O Filii*.

Porbus and Poussin stood motionless on either side of the canvas, plunged in the most vehement

contemplation.

"Look here, young man," the old creature said without turning around, "you see how with three or four strokes and a little bluish glaze you can make the air circulate around the head of this poor saint who must have been stifling in that dense atmosphere! Look how this drapery flutters—now you can see the breeze is lifting it. Before, it looked like some starched linen pinned in place. Notice how the glossy highlight I've just put on her breasts renders the plasticity of a young girl's skin, and how the mixture of russet and burnt ochre warms the cool gray of that big shadow where the blood had congealed instead of flowing. Young man, young man! What I'm showing you here no master could teach you. Only Mabuse possessed the secret of giving figures life, and Mabuse had only one pupil, who happened to be me. I've had none, and I'm an old man. You're intelligent enough to guess the rest, from what I've let you see."

While he was talking, the strange old man touched every part of the painting with the tip of his brush: here two strokes, here only one, always to such effect that it seemed a new picture, but a picture steeped in light. He worked with a frenzy so impassioned that sweat beaded on his bulging forehead; so rapid were his tiny movements, so impatient and abrupt, that to young Poussin there seemed to be a demon at work in the strange creature's body, a demon acting through his hands, uncannily moving them against the old man's will. The preternatural gleam in his eyes, the convulsions which seemed the effect of a certain resistance, made this notion so convincing that the youth's imagination was utterly subjugated. The old man worked on, saying: "There, look! That's how you spread the butter, young man! Come, little brushstrokes, warm up these icy tints! Now then, there, like that!" he muttered, creating a sensuous glow in the very places where he had pointed out a certain lifelessness, abolishing discrepancies of feeling with a few patches of color, restoring the unity of tone required for the figure of an ardent Egyptian woman.

"You see, my boy, it's only the last stroke of the brush that counts. Porbus has laid on a hundred, I've made one. No one will thank us for what's underneath. Remember that!"

Finally this demon stopped, and turning toward Porbus and Poussin who stood speechless with admiration, addressed them: "This is still no match for my Catherine Lescault, but one could put one's name to such a thing. Yes, I could sign it," he added, standing up to find a mirror, in which he studied the painting for a moment. "Now, let's have something to eat," he said. "The two of you will come along to my place for some smoked ham and a good wine. Well, well! For all the bad times we live in, we can talk painting! We're well matched there, and here's a young fellow," he added, clapping Nicolas Poussin on the shoulder, "who gives every sign of having some talent."

Then, noticing the youth's wretched Normandy coat, he drew a leather purse from his belt, rummaged within it, and took out two gold pieces which he handed to Poussin: "I'll buy your drawing."

"Take it," Porbus murmured to Poussin, seeing him start and blush with shame, for the talented youth had a poor man's pride. "Go on, take it. He has the ransom of two kings in his money bags!"

All three descended the stairs from the studio, conversing about the arts until, near the Pont Saint-Michel, they came to a fine timbered house; its decorations, door knocker, and carved window frames amazed young Poussin. Before he knew it, the youth was in a low-ceilinged room in front of a roaring fire, sitting at a table covered with good things to eat, and, by some unheard-of stroke of luck, in the company of two great artists who were inclined to be friendly.

"Young man," Porbus said, seeing Poussin stare openmouthed at a picture, "don't look at that canvas too long, it will drive you to despair."

It was the *Adam* Mabuse had painted to gain release from the prison his creditors had kept him in so long. And indeed the figure produced such an illusion of reality that Nicolas Poussin began to understand the true meaning of the wild claims that had been made by the old man, who now regarded the picture with a complacent expression, though without enthusiasm, as if to say: "I've done better!"

"There's life in it," he said. "My poor master outdid himself there, but the background still lacks a certain degree of truth. The man's alive all right, he's standing up and about to walk toward us, but the sky, the wind, the air we see and feel and breathe aren't there. In fact, the man's the only thing in the picture, and all he is is a man. Now the one man who came straight from the hands of God should have something divine about him, and that's what's missing. Mabuse used to be quite cross with himself about it, when he wasn't drunk."

Poussin glanced back and forth between the old man and Porbus with anxious curiosity. He moved closer to Porbus as if to ask the old man's name; but the painter put a finger to his lips with a mysterious expression, and the youth, though fascinated, held his tongue, hoping that sooner or later some chance word would allow him to guess the name of their host, whose wealth and talents were sufficiently evidenced by the respect Porbus showed him and by the wonders amassed in that room.

Catching sight of a magnificent portrait of a woman set off by the dark oak paneling, Poussin exclaimed, "What a splendid Giorgione!"

“No,” the old man replied. “What you see there is one of my first daubs!”

“Saints preserve us!” Poussin cried naïvely. “I must be in the house of the god of painting!”

The old man smiled like someone long familiar with such praise.

“Maître Frenhofer!” said Porbus. “Couldn’t you manage to order a little of your good Rhenish wine for me?”

“Two casks,” the old man replied. “One to pay for this morning’s pleasure of seeing your lovely sinner, and the other as a gift of friendship.”

“Oh, if I weren’t still ailing,” Porbus continued, “and you would allow me a glimpse of your mistress, I think I could do a picture with life-size figures—something high, wide, and with real depth to it, too.”

“Show you my work!” the old man exclaimed, suddenly upset. “No, no, it must still be brought to perfection. Yesterday, toward evening, I thought I was done. Her eyes seemed moist to me, her flesh was alive, the locks of her hair stirred…She breathed! Though I thought I’d learned how to render nature’s depth and solidity on a flat canvas, this morning, by daylight, I discovered my mistake. Ah! To achieve this glorious result, I’ve studied all the great colorists. Layer by layer I’ve analyzed and dissected the paintings of Titian, and like that master of light, I’ve laid in my figure in high colors with a soft, heavily loaded brush, for shadow is no more than an accident—remember that, my boy. Then I went back over my work and by using halftones and glazes, which I made less and less transparent, I managed to create the strongest shadows and even the deepest blacks—for most painters’ shadows are of a different nature from their lighter tones; they’re wood or bronze, whatever you like, anything except flesh in shadow. You feel that if the figure were to change position, the shadowed parts would never brighten, never become luminous…I’ve avoided this defect where so many of the most illustrious artists have failed: in my pictures the whites are still white within the opacity of even the deepest shadows! Unlike that pack of dabblers who suppose they’re drawing correctly because their work is so painstakingly sleek, I never surround my figures with the sort of dry outlines that emphasize every little anatomical detail—the human body isn’t bounded by lines! In this regard, sculptors come closer to the truth than we painters ever can. Nature consists of a series of shapes that melt into one another. Strictly speaking, there’s no such thing as drawing! Don’t laugh, young man! Strange as it sounds, you’ll understand the truth of this some day. Line is the means by which man accounts for the effect of light on objects, but in nature there are no lines—in nature everything is continuous and whole. It’s by modeling that we draw, by which I mean that once we detach things from the medium in which they exist, only the distribution of light gives the body its appearance! Hence I never fix an outline; I spread a cloud of warm blond halftones over the contours—you can never put your finger right where the contours blend into the backgrounds. At close range, such labors look blurred and seem to lack precision, but at two paces everything congeals, solidifies, stands out; the body turns, the forms project, you feel the air circulating around them. Yet I’m still not satisfied—I have doubts. Perhaps it’s wrong to draw a single line: Wouldn’t it be better to deal with a figure from the center, concentrating first on the projecting parts which take the light most readily, then proceeding to the darker portions? Isn’t that the method of the sun, the divine painter of the universe? Oh nature, nature! Who has ever plumbed your secrets? There’s no escaping it; too much knowledge, like too much ignorance, leads to a negation. My work is …my doubt!”

The old man paused, then continued: “It’s ten years now, young man, that I’ve been struggling with this problem. But what are ten short years when you’re contending with nature? How long did Lord Pygmalion take to create the only statue that ever walked!”

The old man sank into a profound reverie, his eyes fixed and his fingers toying mechanically with his knife.

“Now he’s in conversation with his *genius*,” Porbus whispered.

At this word, Nicolas Poussin was seized by an inexplicable curiosity—an artist’s curiosity. This old man with his blank stare, fixed and comatose, had become more than human in the youth’s eyes: a kind of fantastic genie inhabiting an unknown sphere, rousing a thousand vague ideas in his soul. The moral phenomenon of such fascination can no more be defined than we can translate into words the emotion produced by a song reminding an exile of his homeland. The scorn the old man affected for the noble endeavors of art, his wealth, his odd manners, Porbus’s deference toward him, his supreme work of art kept secret for so long—a work of patience, doubtless of genius, judging by the head of the Virgin which young Poussin had so candidly admired and which, still beautiful even beside Mabuse’s *Adam*, evidenced the imperial mastery of one of the princes of art: everything about this old man transcended the limits of human nature. What Nicolas Poussin’s fervent imagination could apprehend, what now became quite clear to him from his intercourse with this supernatural being, was a consummate image of the artist’s nature, that wild nature to which so many powers are entrusted, and which all too often abuses them, leading cold reason, the bourgeois public, and even some connoisseurs down a myriad barren paths, precisely where this capricious white-winged sprite discovers castles, epics, works of art! A nature sometimes mocking,

sometimes kind, at once fertile and desolate! So for the enthusiastic Poussin, this old man had become, by a sudden transfiguration, Art itself, art with all its secrets, its passions, its reveries.

"Yes, my dear Porbus," Frenhofer continued, "till now, what I've failed to find is a flawless woman, a body whose contours are perfectly beautiful, and whose complexion—But where is she in the flesh?" he interrupted himself. "That matchless Venus of the ancients, so often sought and never found except in scattered elements, some fragmentary beauties here, some there! Oh! I would give all I possess if just once, for a single moment, I could gaze upon that complete, that divine nature; if I could meet that ideal heavenly beauty, I would search for her in limbo itself! Like Orpheus, I would descend into the Hades of art to bring her back to life!"

"We might as well leave now," Porbus murmured to Poussin. "He doesn't hear us anymore, or see us either!"

"Let's go up to his studio," the dazzled youth suggested.

"Oh, the old monkey has made sure to keep it locked away from the likes of you and me. His treasures are too well protected for us to get at them. I didn't wait for your suggestion and your imagination to lay siege to that mystery..."

"Then there is a mystery?"

"Yes," Porbus replied. "Old Frenhofer is the only pupil Mabuse would take on. Becoming his friend, his savior, his father, Frenhofer sacrificed the greater part of his treasures to satisfy Mabuse's passions; in exchange, Mabuse bequeathed him the secret of relief in painting, the power to give his figures an extraordinary life, that natural bloom which is our eternal despair but the technique of which he possessed so securely that one day, having drunk up the money for the brocaded damask he was to wear at the ceremonial reception of Charles V, he accompanied his patron wearing paper garments painted to look like damask. The special luster of the material Mabuse was wearing amazed the Emperor, who, in attempting to compliment the old drunkard's companion, discovered the deception. Frenhofer's a man in love with our art, a man who sees higher and farther than other painters. He's meditated on the nature of color, on the absolute truth of line, but by dint of so much research, he has come to doubt the very object of his investigations. In moments of despair, he claims that drawing doesn't exist and that lines are only good for rendering geometrical figures, which is far from the truth, since with line and with black, which is not a color, we can create a human figure. There's your proof that our art is like nature itself, composed of an infinity of elements: drawing accounts for the skeleton, color supplies life, but life without a skeleton is even more deficient than a skeleton without life. Lastly, there's something even truer than all this, which is that practice and observation are everything to a painter; so that if reasoning and poetry argue with our brushes, we wind up in doubt, like our old man here, who's as much a lunatic as he is a painter—a sublime painter who had the misfortune to be born into wealth, which has allowed him to wander far and wide. Don't do that to yourself! Work while you can! A painter should philosophize only with a brush in his hand."

"We'll get in there somehow!" Poussin exclaimed, no longer listening to Porbus and oblivious of obstacles. Porbus smiled at the unknown youth's enthusiasm and took his leave, offering an invitation to come and see him.

Nicolas Poussin slowly made his way toward the rue de la Harpe, so absorbed that he walked right past his modest lodgings. Turning back and climbing the filthy stairs with anxious haste, he reached a high bedroom under a half-timbered gable poorly protected by the flimsy roofing of old Parisian houses. Near the one dark window of his room, he saw a girl who, at the sound of the door, suddenly jumped up with a loving impulse—she had recognized the painter by the way he jiggled the latch.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"Wrong!" he exclaimed, gasping with excitement. "For the first time in my life I realized I could be a painter! Until now I doubted myself, but this morning I believed! I can be a great man! You'll see, Gillette, we'll be rich, we'll be happy! There's gold in these brushes!"

But suddenly he fell silent. The look of joy faded from his serious, energetic countenance as he compared the immensity of his hopes to the insignificance of his resources. The walls were covered with sheets of paper crisscrossed with crayon sketches. He owned perhaps four clean canvases. Paints were expensive in those days, and the poor young gentleman's palette was nearly bare. Yet in the depths of such poverty, he possessed and reveled in incredible riches of spirit and a superabundance of consuming genius. Lured to Paris by a nobleman who had befriended him, or perhaps by his own ambitions, he had succeeded in finding a mistress, one of those noble, generous souls who endure their trials at a great man's side, espousing his poverty and struggling to understand his whims, intrepid in love and poverty as other women are in the show of luxury and heartlessness. The smile playing over Gillette's lips gilded their garret and rivaled the light of heaven. The sun might not always shine, but she was always there, steadfast in her

passion, devoted to his suffering as to his happiness, consoling the genius who exulted in their love before taking possession of his art.

“Listen, Gillette, I have something to tell you.” Obediently, the happy girl leaped onto the painter’s lap. She was grace itself, lovely as springtime, adorned with all the feminine charms which she illuminated with the flame of a beautiful soul.

“Oh God!” he exclaimed. “I’ll never dare ask her...”

“Is it a secret?” she interrupted. “I want to hear it.”

Poussin remained lost in thought.

“Tell me what it is!”

“Gillette, my poor sweetheart!”

“Oh, you want me to do something?”

“Yes.”

“If you want me to pose for you the way I did the other day,” she continued with a little pout, “I’ll never do that again, for when I do, your eyes no longer speak to me. You aren’t thinking of me, even when you’re looking right at me.”

“Would you like it better if I was drawing another woman?”

“Maybe,” she said, “if she were really ugly.”

“Well then,” Poussin continued in a serious tone of voice, “what if, for my future glory—if it would make me a great painter—you were to pose for someone else?”

“You’re testing me,” she said. “You know perfectly well I wouldn’t do it!”

Poussin’s head dropped onto his chest like a man yielding to a joy or a sorrow too strong for his soul.

“Listen,” she said, tugging the sleeve of Poussin’s threadbare doublet, “I’ve told you, Nick, I’d give my life for you, but I never promised you I’d give up my love.”

“Give it up?” cried Poussin.

“If I showed myself that way to someone else, you wouldn’t love me anymore. And I myself would feel unworthy of you. I do everything you ask, don’t I? It’s only natural I should. In spite of myself, I’m happy that way. I’m even proud to do your will. But for someone else—oh no!”

“Forgive me, Gillette!” the painter exclaimed, kneeling before her. “I’d rather have love than all the fame in the world—you’re more to me than wealth and honors. Go throw away my brushes, burn these sketches. I was wrong. My vocation is loving you—I’m not a painter, I’m a lover. Let art and its secrets go to the devil!”

She marveled at him, happy, enchanted! She ruled now, and felt instinctively that art was forgotten for her sake, cast at her feet like a grain of incense.

“Even so, he’s just an old man,” mused Poussin. “He’d only be able to see the woman in you. You’re so perfect!”

“Love conquers all!” she cried, ready to sacrifice her romantic scruples to reward Poussin for all he was giving up on her account. “But it will be the ruin of me. Oh, I’m perfectly willing to ruin myself for your sake! I know it’s a beautiful thing to do, but then you’ll forget me. Oh, what a terrible idea has taken possession of your mind!”

“It has, and I love you,” he said with a sort of contrition. “Does that make me a villain?”

“Shall we consult Father Hardouin?” she asked.

“Oh no, let it be our secret.”

“All right then, I’ll go, but you must not be there,” she said. “Stay outside the door, keep your sword drawn, and if I scream, come in and kill the painter.”

No longer envisioning anything but his art, Poussin flung his arms around Gillette.

“He doesn’t love me anymore!” thought Gillette once she was alone, already regretting her decision. But she soon fell prey to a fear crueler than her regret, though she tried to dismiss the dreadful thought that coiled round her heart: perhaps she already loved the painter less, suspecting him of being less worthy of love than before.

2. Catherine Lescault

Three months after Poussin met Porbus, the latter paid a visit to Maître Frenhofer. The old man was suffering at the time from one of those deep and spontaneous depressions caused, according to the mathematicians of medicine, by poor digestion, by wind, by heat, or by some swelling of the abdominal regions; and according to those who prefer a spiritual explanation, by the imperfection of our moral nature.

The poor man was quite simply exhausted by the effort to complete his mysterious picture. He appeared to have collapsed on an enormous throne of carved oak upholstered in black leather, and without altering his melancholy posture, he stared at Porbus with the expression of a man not to be argued out of his distress.

"Well now, maître," Porbus cajoled him, "was it so bad, that ultramarine you went all the way to Bruges for? Or couldn't you grind your new white fine enough? Has your oil gone sour? Are the brushes stiff?"

"Alas!" the old man cried. "For a time I believed my painting was done; but now I'm sure several details are wrong, and I won't have a moment's peace till I've dispelled my doubts. I've made up my mind to travel —I'm off to Greece, Turkey, even Asia to look for a model; I want to compare my picture to various beauties in nature. Perhaps," he continued with a smile of satisfaction, "perhaps I've got nature herself upstairs. Sometimes I'm almost afraid to breathe, lest I waken the woman and she vanishes." And he suddenly stood up, as if to leave at that moment.

"Oh, then I'm just in time," Porbus replied, "to spare you the expense and the fatigue of the journey."

"How's that?" asked Frenhofer in surprise.

"Young Poussin happens to have a mistress of incomparable beauty—not one defect! But if he consents to lend her to you, you must give us at least a glimpse of that canvas of yours."

The old man remained standing just where he had risen to his feet, in a state of utter stupefaction.

"What!" he exclaimed at last, with a wail of pain. "Expose my creation, my wife? Rend the veil by which I've so chastely hidden my happiness? But that would be a terrible prostitution! For ten years now I've lived with this woman; she's mine, mine alone, she loves me. Hasn't she smiled at me with each brushstroke I've given her? She has a soul, I tell you, the soul I've endowed her with. She'd blush if other eyes than mine were fastened on her. Show her! What husband, what lover would be vile enough to put his own wife to such shame? When you paint a picture for the court, you needn't put your very soul into it; what you're selling the courtiers is no more than a fancy mannequin! My painting's not a painting, my figure's a feeling, a passion! Born in my studio, my beauty must remain inviolate there—she may not leave until she's fully dressed. Poetry and women show themselves naked only to their lovers! Do we possess Raphael's model, Ariosto's Angelica, Dante's Beatrice? No, we see only their Forms. Well! The work I keep under lock and key upstairs is an exception in our art. It isn't a canvas, it's a woman! A woman with whom I weep and laugh and talk and think. Do you suppose I'd suddenly abandon ten years' felicity the way you take off a cloak? That all at once I'd cease being a father, a lover, and God Himself? This woman's not a creature, she's a creation. Let your young man come, I'll give him my treasures, I'll give him Correggios, Titians, even Michelangelos! I'll kiss his footprints in the dust. But make him my rival? Shame on me! Ha, ha! I'm still more of a lover than a painter. Yes, I'm strong enough to burn my Catherine as I draw my dying breath, but to compel her to endure the gaze of a man, a young man, a painter? No, no! If anyone sullied her with a glance, I'd kill him the next day! I'd kill you then and there, my friend, if you didn't greet her on your knees! And you'd have me subject my idol to the cold gaze and the stupid criticisms of fools? Ah, love's a mystery: it lives only in the depths of our hearts, and all is lost when a man says, even to his friend, 'This is the woman I love!'"

The old man seemed to become young again; his eyes glistened with life, his pale cheeks were tinged with a sudden red, and his hands trembled. Porbus, amazed at the passionate violence with which these words were spoken, was at a loss to reply to a sentiment as novel as it was profound. Was Frenhofer in his right mind, or was he mad? Had he been overtaken by an artist's illusion, or did such ideas result from that ineffable fanaticism caused by the long gestation of a great work? Could one ever hope to speak reason to this strange passion?

A prey to such thoughts, Porbus asked the old man, "But isn't it one woman for another? Isn't Poussin yielding his mistress to your eyes?"

"What mistress is that?" Frenhofer sneered. "She'll betray him sooner or later. Mine will always be faithful!"

"All right," Porbus resumed, "we'll say no more about it. But before you find—even in Asia—a woman as beautiful, as perfect as the one I'm telling you about, you may die without finishing your picture."

"Oh, it's finished!" Frenhofer said. "Anyone seeing it would suppose he saw a woman lying on a velvet coverlet, her bed surrounded by draperies, and at her side, a golden tripod exhaling incense. You'd be tempted to seize the tassel of the cord tying back the draperies, and you'd believe you saw the breast of Catherine rising and falling with her breath. Yet I must be sure..."

"Then go to Asia," Porbus replied, detecting a sort of hesitation in Frenhofer's gaze. And he took a few steps toward the door of the room.

At that very moment, Gillette and Nicolas Poussin had reached Frenhofer's house. About to go in, the girl released the painter's arm and drew back as if seized by a sudden presentiment.

"What am I doing here?" she asked her lover in a hollow tone of voice, looking him straight in the eye.

“Gillette, I’ve left the decision up to you, and I’ll obey you, whatever you say. You’re my conscience and my glory. Let’s go back to the inn. I may be happier there than if you...”

“Am I my own mistress when you speak to me like that? Oh no, I’m just a child. Let’s go in,” she urged, seeming to make a violent effort. “If our love dies, if I’m opening my heart to eternal regret, won’t your glory be my reward for obeying your wishes? Let’s go in: being an eternal memory on your palette will still be a kind of life.”

Opening the door of the house, the two lovers almost bumped into Porbus who, astonished by this sudden encounter with Gillette, whose eyes were just then full of tears, took her, trembling, by the arm and led her into the old man’s presence. “Look here,” he said. “Isn’t she worth all the masterpieces in the world?”

Frenhofer gave a start. Gillette stood before him in the innocent posture of a terrified Circassian girl carried off by brigands to some slave dealer. A modest blush suffused her countenance, her eyes were lowered, her hands hung at her sides, her strength seemed to leave her, and tears protested against the violence done to her modesty. At this moment Poussin, in despair at having taken this lovely treasure out of his attic, cursed himself: once again he became more lover than artist, and a thousand scruples racked his heart when he saw the rejuvenated gaze of the old man who, in the fashion of all painters, undressed the girl with his eyes, divining her most secret forms. Poussin reverted then to the true lover’s fierce jealousy.

“Gillette, let’s leave!” he exclaimed.

At these words, spoken in that tone, his overjoyed mistress raised her eyes to her lover and flung herself into his arms.

“Oh, you do love me!” she cried, bursting into tears; having willed herself not to reveal her suffering, she had no strength left to conceal her joy.

“Oh, leave her with me, just for a moment,” the old painter pleaded, “and you can compare her to my Catherine. Yes, I consent.”

There was still something of love in Frenhofer’s plea. He seemed prey to a certain coquetry toward his painted lady, and to enjoy in advance the victory his artificial virgin’s beauty would gain over that of a real girl.

“Don’t let him go back on his word!” exclaimed Porbus, clapping Poussin on the shoulder. “The fruits of love wither quickly; those of art are immortal.”

“For him,” Gillette whispered, looking hard at Poussin and then at Porbus, “for him, then, I’m nothing more than a woman?” She raised her head proudly, but when, after darting a glance at Frenhofer, she saw her lover once again studying the portrait he had lately taken for a Giorgione, she continued, “Ah! let’s go upstairs. He’s never looked at me that way.”

“Old man,” Poussin continued, torn from his meditation by Gillette’s voice, “you see this sword? I’ll thrust it into your heart at the first word of complaint from this child, I’ll set fire to your house, and no one will get out alive. Do you understand?”

Nicolas Poussin was grim, and his words were terrible. This utterance, and especially the young painter’s gesture, consoled Gillette, who almost forgave him for sacrificing her to painting and to his glorious future. Porbus and Poussin remained at the studio door, staring at each other in silence. At first the painter of *Mary of Egypt* allowed himself a few exclamations—“Now she’s undressing... Now he’s telling her to stand where there’s daylight...Now he’s comparing her!” But Porbus fell silent at the sight of Poussin’s face, which expressed a terrible sadness, and although old painters no longer feel such petty scruples in the presence of art, he admired these two young people for being so naïve and so charming. Poussin kept his hand on his sword hilt, his ear pressed to the door. Standing there in the shadows, the two men looked like a pair of conspirators waiting for the moment to assault a tyrant.

“Come in, come in!” the old man called, radiant with joy. “My work is perfect, and now I can show it to you with pride. Never will painter, paintbrush, color, canvas, or light succeed in creating a rival to *Catherine Lescault.*”

Seized by the keenest curiosity, Porbus and Poussin rushed into the middle of a vast studio covered with dust, where everything was in chaos; here and there they caught sight of paintings and sketches on the walls, and suddenly stopped, both of them overcome with admiration, before a life-size figure of a half-naked woman.

“Oh, don’t bother with that!” Frenhofer said. “That’s just a study for a pose; as a picture it’s worth nothing at all. These are my mistakes,” he continued, gesturing at the ravishing compositions hung on the walls around them.

At these words, Porbus and Poussin, astonished by this disdain for such works, sought the portrait they had been promised, without managing to find it.

“Well, here it is,” the old man announced, his hair disheveled, his face inflamed by a preternatural exaltation, his eyes sparkling, and panting like a lovesick swain. “Aha! You weren’t expecting such

perfection, were you? You're in the presence of a woman, and you're still looking for a picture. There's such depth on this canvas, the air is so real you can no longer distinguish it from the air around yourselves. Where's the art? Gone, vanished! Here's true form—the very form of a girl. Haven't I captured the color, the energy of the line that seems to bound her body? Isn't this just the phenomenon presented by objects that live in air as fish live in water? Notice how the contours are silhouetted against the background! That back! Doesn't it look as if you could run your hand down that? It took me seven years' study to achieve such effects, the conjugation of objects with daylight! And that hair! You see how the light glows through it...But I do believe she's breathing...You see that breast? Ah! Who could fail to worship her on his knees? The flesh throbs, she's about to stand up, wait a moment..."

"Do you see anything?" Poussin whispered to Porbus.

"No. Do you?"

"Nothing."

The two painters left the old man to his ecstasy and tried to see whether the light, falling directly on the canvas he was showing them, had neutralized its every effect. Then they peered at the picture by moving to the right, to the left, first crouching then straightening up again.

"Yes, yes, it really is a canvas," Frenhofer assured them, mistaking the purpose of this scrutiny. "See, here's the stretcher, there's the easel, then here are my paints, my brushes." And he took up a brush which he presented to them with a naïve gesture.

"The old fraud's pulling our leg," Poussin murmured, returning to face the so-called painting. "All I see are colors daubed one on top of the other and contained by a mass of strange lines forming a wall of paint."

"We must be missing something," Porbus insisted.

Coming closer, they discerned, in one corner of the canvas, the tip of a bare foot emerging from this chaos of colors, shapes, and vague shadings, a kind of incoherent mist; but a delightful foot, a living foot! They stood stock-still with admiration before this fragment which had escaped from an incredible, slow, and advancing destruction. That foot appeared there like the torso of some Parian marble Venus rising out of the ruins of a city burned to ashes.

"There's a woman under there!" Porbus cried, drawing Poussin's attention to the layers of color the old painter had superimposed, imagining he was perfecting his art.

The two painters spontaneously turned toward Frenhofer, beginning to realize, however vaguely, the state of ecstasy which imprisoned him.

"He means it," Porbus said.

"Yes, my friend," the old man replied as he wakened from his trance, "you must have faith, faith in art, and you must live a long time with your work to produce a creation like this. Some of these shadows cost me a lot of hard work. Look there—on that cheek, under the eyes—that faint shadow which you'd swear was untranslatable if you saw it in nature. Do you suppose an effect like that didn't cost me incredible difficulties to reproduce? But also, my dear Porbus, consider my work closely, and you'll understand something more of what I was telling you about the way I handle the modeling and the outlines. Look at the light on the breast and you'll see how, by a series of brushstrokes and by accents applied with a full brush, I've managed to capture the truth of light and to combine it with the gleaming whiteness of the highlights, and how, by an opposite effort, by smoothing the ridges and the texture of the paint itself, by caressing my figure's contours and by submerging them in halftones, I have eliminated the very notion of drawing, of artificial means, and given my work the look and the actual solidity of nature. Come closer, you'll see better how it's done. At a distance, it vanishes. You see? Here, right here, I believe it's truly remarkable."

And with the tip of his brush, he showed the two painters a patch of bright color.

Porbus clapped the old man on the shoulder, turning toward Poussin. "You know," he said, "we have here a very great painter."

"Even more of a poet than a painter," Poussin replied gravely.

"Here," continued Porbus, touching the canvas, "right here ends our art on earth."

"Whereupon it vanishes in the heavens," said Poussin.

"How many delights in this one bit of canvas!" Porbus exclaimed.

The old man, preoccupied, paid no heed to them and went on smiling at his imaginary woman.

"But sooner or later he'll notice that there's nothing on his canvas!" Poussin exclaimed.

"Nothing on my canvas?" echoed Frenhofer, looking back and forth between the two painters and his imagined picture.

"What have you done!" Porbus growled at Poussin.

The old man gripped the youth's arm violently and cried, "You see nothing! Boor! Infidel! Catamite! What did you come up here for, anyway?— My good Porbus," he broke off, turning toward the painter, "are you

mocking me, too? I'm your friend, you can tell me the truth: Have I spoiled my picture?"

Porbus hesitated; he dared not speak, but the anxiety revealed in the old man's features was so cruel that he could only point to the canvas and stammer, "See for yourself!"

Frenhofer stared at his picture for a moment and staggered as if from a blow. "Nothing, nothing! And after working ten years!" He sat down and wept. "I'm an imbecile then, a madman with neither talent nor ability. Just a rich man who makes no more than what he buys ...I've created nothing!" He studied his canvas through his tears, suddenly standing up with great pride and darting an angry glance at the two painters. "By the body and blood of Christ, the two of you are envious thieves who want me to believe I've spoiled her so you can steal her from me! But I can see her!" he exclaimed. "I see her, and she's marvelously beautiful!"

At that moment, Poussin heard the sound of weeping—it was Gillette, forgotten in a corner.

"What's the matter, angel?" the young painter asked, suddenly becoming a lover again.

"Kill me!" she cried. "I'd be vile to love you still—you fill me with contempt. I admire you, yet you horrify me. I love you, and I think I hate you already!"

While Poussin was listening to Gillette, Frenhofer again draped a green serge cloth over his Catherine, with the intent composure of a jeweler locking his velvet trays, imagining he is in the company of clever thieves. He cast a sly glance, full of suspicion and scorn, at the two painters, and without a word led them to his studio door. Then, at the bottom of the stairs, on the threshold of his house, he said to them, "Farewell, my little friends."

That farewell made the two painters' blood run cold. The next day, a worried Porbus visited Frenhofer again and was told that he had died during the night, after burning his canvases.

—Paris, February 1832

GAMBARA

To the Marquis of Belloy

It was during afternoon tea at the fireside of a mysterious retreat which no longer exists save as memory will preserve it, overlooking Paris from the hills of Bellevue to those of Belleville, from Montmartre to the Arc de Triomphe, that amid the myriad ideas which exploded and expired like rockets in your sparkling conversation, you offered my pen, with characteristic generosity, this character worthy of Hoffmann, a bearer of unknown treasures and a pilgrim at the gates of Paradise, endowed with ears to hear angelic harmonies yet no longer a tongue to repeat them, touching the keyboard with fingers deformed by the contractions of divine inspiration, under the illusion he was playing celestial music to stupefied listeners. You created Gambara, I merely costumed him. Let me render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, regretting you did not take up the pen at a period when noblemen might employ it as well as the sword in their country's service. You may well take no thought for yourself, but your talents you owe to us.

New Year's Day of the year one thousand eight hundred and thirty-one was emptying its packet of holiday sugarplums: four o'clock had struck, restaurants were beginning to fill, and there was a crowd in the Palais Royal. Presently a carriage stopped at the entrance and out of it stepped a young man of proud bearing, doubtless a foreigner or he would not have been attended by such an aristocratically plumed footman nor displayed on his carriage doors the quarterings still coveted by heroes of the July monarchy. The stranger entered the Palais Royal and joined the crowd under the arcades, patient with the slow pace to which the press of idlers condemned his progress. He appeared accustomed to the measured gait ironically known as "an ambassador's walk," though his dignity seemed a trifle theatrical: handsome and severe as his countenance was, his hat, beneath which emerged a tuft of curly black hair, tilted perhaps a little too far over his right ear, belying his gravity by a slightly roguish look; his inattentive, half-closed eyes cast disdainful glances at the crowd.

"Now there's a really good-looking man," murmured a shopgirl, stepping aside to let him pass.

“Who’s well aware of the fact,” her homely companion replied in a loud voice.

After a turn around the arcades, the young man glanced at the sky and then at his watch, made an impatient gesture, and entered a tobacconist’s shop where he lit a cigar and lingered in front of a mirror to inspect his clothes which were a little showier than the laws of French taste prescribe. He fiddled with his collar, tugged at a black velvet vest crisscrossed by one of those heavy gold chains made in Genoa, and, casually flinging over his left shoulder a velvet-lined cloak which he then rearranged with some care, the young man resumed his promenade without permitting himself to be distracted by the appraising glances that marked his progress. When lights began to appear in the shops and the evening seemed dark enough, he headed toward the Place du Palais Royal like a man afraid to be recognized, skirting the square till he reached the fountain where, shielded by the line of fiacres, he entered the dark, dirty, and disreputable rue Froidmanteau, a sort of sewer the police tolerate near the well-swept Palais Royal, the way an Italian majordomo allows a careless footman to leave a pile of household trash in a corner of the staircase. The young man hesitated, for all the world like a suburban matron in her Sunday best anxiously peering across a rain-swollen gutter. Yet the hour was well chosen to satisfy even the most shameful fantasy: earlier one might be found out, later one might be forestalled. To have let himself be lured by one of those glances that prompt without being exactly provocative; to have followed for an hour, perhaps even a whole day, some lovely young woman idealized in his thoughts, her most trivial actions interpreted a thousand flattering ways; to have started believing in sudden, irresistible sympathies; to have imagined, in the heat of a passing exhilaration, an adventure in an age when romances are written precisely because they no longer occur; to have dreamed, wrapped in Almaviva’s cloak, of balconies and guitars, of stratagems and locks; to have written a rapturous poem and now be standing at an ill-famed door; and then—for a grand finale!—to discover his Rosina’s decorum to be no more than a precaution imposed by a police regulation—is not all this a disappointment many men have endured without admitting it? The most natural emotions are those we acknowledge with the most repugnance, and conceit is surely one of these. When the lesson stops there, a Parisian will profit by it or put it out of his mind, and no great harm is done; but this is scarcely the case for a foreigner about to discover how much his Parisian education may cost.

This stroller was a Milanese nobleman banished from his country, where several liberal escapades had rendered him persona non grata to the Austrian government. Count Andrea Marcosini had found himself welcomed to Paris with that entirely French enthusiasm invariably encountered by a lively wit and a resonant name accompanied by two hundred thousand francs a year and a charming presence. For such an individual, exile was a pleasure trip; his property was merely sequestrated, and his friends informed him that after an absence of two years at the most, he could reappear in his homeland without the slightest danger. After rhyming *crudeli affanni* with *i miei tiranni* in a dozen sonnets, after sharing his purse with a number of less fortunate Italian refugees, Count Andrea, who had the misfortune to be a poet, considered himself emancipated from his patriotic notions. Soon after his arrival, therefore, he surrendered without reservation to the various pleasures Paris offers gratis to anyone rich enough to purchase them. His talents and good looks had won him many successes among the female sex, whom he loved collectively as befitted his age, but among whom he as yet distinguished no one in particular. This taste, moreover, was subordinated in him to passions for music and poetry that he had cultivated since childhood; it struck him as more difficult and more glorious to succeed in these than in gallantry, since nature had spared him the obstacles other men are pleased to overcome. A complex man like so many others, he was easily seduced by the pleasures of luxury without which he could not have survived, just as he set great store by the social distinctions which his opinions rejected. Hence his theories as an artist, a thinker, and a poet were frequently inconsistent with his tastes, his sentiments, and his habits as a millionaire nobleman; but he consoled himself for these contradictions by discovering them in many Parisians who were similarly liberal in their interests, aristocratic by nature.

It had occasioned him no surprise, therefore, albeit a certain anxiety, on December 31, 1830, to be walking, during one of our midwinter thaws, close behind a woman whose clothes indicated a profound, radical, long-standing, indeed inveterate poverty, no prettier than so many others he saw every evening at the Théâtre des Bouffons, at the Opéra, in the salons, and certainly not so young as Madame de Manerville, from whom he had obtained the promise of a rendezvous this very day and who may still have been expecting him. Still there was something so tender yet so fierce in the intense glances the creature kept darting at him—so much suffering, so many stifled pleasures! And she had blushed so furiously when, emerging from a shop where she had remained a quarter of an hour, her eyes met those of the Milanese nobleman who had waited for her a few steps away!... There were, in fact, so many *yets* that the count, overcome by one of those furious temptations for which there is no name in any language, even in the vocabulary of orgy, had set off in pursuit of this woman in just the way an old Parisian hunts down shopgirls. As he walked along, sometimes behind, sometimes ahead of her, he scrutinized every detail of her

person and attire, hoping to dislodge the absurd and insensate desire which had taken possession of his brain; he soon realized that this examination was affording him a deeper pleasure than the kind he had tasted the day before in contemplating, under the ripples of a perfumed bath, the irreproachable forms of a cherished mistress. From time to time this unknown creature would lower her head and give him the sidelong glance of a tethered goat; then, realizing she was still pursued, she walked faster as though to escape. Yet when a crush of carriages or some other incident brought Andrea close, he saw her flinch under his gaze without anything in her features betraying annoyance. These sure signs of an emotional struggle provided the ultimate spur to the unruly dreams which were exciting him, and he raced down the rue Froidmanteau which, after many false starts, the woman suddenly entered, imagining she had eluded her pursuer. He was indeed astonished by this maneuver. Night had fallen. Two heavily rouged creatures drinking cassis at a wineshop counter caught sight of the young woman and called to her. She stopped on the threshold, answered their friendly compliments by a few soft-spoken words, and continued on her way. Andrea, still walking behind her, saw her vanish into one of the darkest doorways on this street, the name of which was still unknown to him. The repellent aspect of the house the heroine of his fantasy had just entered gave him a feeling close to nausea. Stepping back to examine the premises, he found a nasty-looking fellow at his side, and asked him what kind of place this was. The man, clasping a knotty stick in his right hand and resting his left on his hip, answered with a single word: “Joker!” But as he continued staring at the Italian under the streetlamp, his countenance assumed a conciliatory expression.

“Oh, excuse me, monsieur,” he went on, suddenly changing his tone. “There’s a restaurant, too, a sort of table d’hôte, but the cooking’s terrible—they put cheese in the soup! Perhaps that’s what monsieur is looking for? It’s easy to see from his clothes that monsieur is Italian; Italians are quite fond of velvet—and of cheese. If monsieur would like me to show him a better restaurant, my aunt lives nearby, and she’s very fond of foreigners.”

Andrea pulled his cloak up to his mustache and hurried out of the street, repelled by this unpleasant individual whose garments and gestures closely matched the wretched house into which the unknown woman had just vanished. He was relieved to return to the innumerable comforts of his lodgings, and spent the rest of the evening at the Marquise d’Espard’s in an attempt to purge the contamination of this folly which had so tyrannically preoccupied him for a good part of the day. Yet after he had gone to bed, in the stillness of the night, the day’s vision returned, even more distinct and vivid than in reality. The unknown woman was still walking ahead of him: occasionally, as she stepped over a gutter, she raised her skirt and showed a shapely leg; her hips shifted nervously at every step. Once again Andrea longed to speak to her, and—he, Marcosini, a Milanese nobleman!—dared not. Then she entered the dark doorway which swallowed her up, and he chided himself for not having followed her. “For after all,” he said to himself, “if she was avoiding me and wanted to put me off the scent, that means she’s attracted to me. With women of her kind, resistance is a proof of love. If I had gone a little further with this business, I might have encountered something really disgusting, but at least I’d be able to sleep in peace.” The count was in the habit of analyzing his keenest sensations, as men involuntarily do whose brains are as active as their hearts, and he was amazed to see the unknown woman of the rue Froidmanteau again, not in the ideal majesty of visions but in all the nakedness of her distressing reality. Yet if his fantasy had stripped this woman of her livery of wretchedness, she would have been spoiled for him, for he wanted her, he desired her, he loved her with her muddy stockings, her down-at-the-heel shoes, her battered straw bonnet! He wanted her in that very house he had seen her enter! “Am I enslaved by vice?” he asked himself, with some alarm. “I haven’t come to that—not yet! I’m twenty-three years old, and I’m hardly an old roué.” The very energy of his obsession reassured him a little. This strange struggle, this reflection, and this love of the chase might with good reason surprise some persons accustomed to the ways of Paris; but it must be borne in mind that Count Andrea Marcosini was not a Frenchman.

Raised by two abbés who, on the instructions of a pious father, rarely granted him any freedom whatever, Andrea had not loved a cousin at eleven, nor at twelve seduced his mother’s chambermaid; he had not frequented those academies where the most advanced instruction is not the kind provided by the State. Moreover, he had lived in Paris only a few years: he was therefore still open to those sudden and intense impressions against which French education and manners form so powerful a shield. In southern countries, grand passions are frequently generated by no more than a glance. A Gascon nobleman of the count’s acquaintance who had learned to temper a powerful sensibility by powerful reflection, accumulating a thousand little defenses against sudden paroxysms of head and heart, had advised Marcosini to indulge at least once a month in some magisterial orgy in order to dispel these tempests of the soul which, in the absence of such precautions, are likely to explode malapropos. Andrea recalled this advice. “Well,” he resolved, “I’ll begin tomorrow, January first!”

This explains why Count Andrea Marcosini was wavering so timidly about entering the rue

Froidmanteau. The man of fashion embarrassed the lover and hesitated a long while, but after making a final appeal to his courage, the lover walked quite resolutely to the doorway he recognized without difficulty. Here he stopped once more. Was this woman really all he imagined? Wasn't he about to commit some enormous gaffe? Then he remembered the Italian table d'hôte, and eagerly seized a middle term which would serve both his desire and his repugnance. He would enter the place in order to dine there! Andrea opened the door and walked down a dark hallway at the end of which he found, after some fumbling, a damp and slippery staircase which to an Italian grand seigneur must have seemed little more than a ladder. Climbing the stairs by the light of a small lamp set on the floor and following a strong smell of cooking, he pushed a half-open door and found himself in a low room dingy with smoke and dirt, where a woman out of Leonardo's caricatures was setting a table for some twenty diners, none as yet present. After a glance around this dim room where the paper dangled in strips from the walls, the count chose a seat near the stove that was hissing and smoking in one corner. Alerted by the sounds this first guest made as he came in and took off his cloak, the maître d'hôtel suddenly appeared. Imagine a tall, thin, wizened chef, endowed with a perfectly enormous nose, darting feverish glances around the room in an attempt to appear conscientious. Catching sight of Andrea, every item of whose appearance suggested great wealth, Signor Giardini bowed respectfully. The count indicated his desire to dine regularly in the company of his compatriots, to take a certain number of meal tickets in advance, and managed to give the conversation a friendly turn in order to arrive more readily at his real goal. No sooner had he mentioned the unknown woman he was interested in than Signor Giardini made a grotesque gesture and cast a sly glance at his guest, allowing a smile to pass over his lips.

"*Basta!*" he exclaimed. "*Capisco! Vossignoria* has been brought here by two appetites. Signora Gambara hasn't wasted her time if she's managed to interest a gentleman as generous as you appear to be. In few words I shall tell you all we know about this poor woman, who is truly to be pitied! The husband is a native of Cremona, I believe, and comes here from Germany, where he intended to create new music and new musical instruments among *i Tedeschi*! Is that not pitiable?" Giardini inquired with a shrug of the shoulders. "Signor Gambara, who takes himself for a great composer, does not strike me as great in other respects. *Galant'uomo* though he may be, full of wit and knowledge, on occasion quite agreeable, particularly when he has taken a few glasses of wine—a rare occasion, by reason of his dreadful poverty—he busies himself night and day composing imaginary operas and symphonies instead of trying to earn an honest living. His poor wife is reduced to doing needlework for all sorts of people, some really beyond the pale! What else can she do? She loves her husband like a father and looks after him like a baby! Any number of young men have dined with us to pay their court to the signora, yet none has achieved *success*," he announced, emphasizing this last word. "Signora Marianna is a virtuous woman, too virtuous for her own good! Men give nothing for nothing today. And so the poor woman will starve to death! And how do you think the husband rewards such devotion? ... Bah! With not even a smile. Bread and water is all they eat, for not only does this poor devil not earn a sou, he even spends whatever money his wife earns on instruments which he carves and lengthens and shortens and takes apart and puts together until the only sounds they make scare away the cats; then he's happy! And yet you'll see—he's the gentlest and kindest of men, anything but idle, always working. The truth is, he's mad and doesn't know it. I've seen him filing and forging those instruments of his and eating black bread with an appetite I myself would envy, though I serve the best table in Paris. Yes, *eccellenza*, a quarter of an hour from now you'll learn the sort of man I am. I've introduced refinements into Italian cooking which will astound you. I am a Neapolitan, *eccellenza*, which means I am a born chef. But what use is instinct without knowledge? Knowledge! I've spent thirty years acquiring knowledge, and you see where it's brought me. Mine is the story of all men of talent! My discoveries, my experiments have ruined three restaurants in succession, in Naples, in Parma, in Rome. Today, now that I'm reduced to making a trade of my art, I indulge my ruling passions more than ever before. I serve these poor refugees some of my favorite dishes—and that's how I ruin myself! Nonsense, you'll say? I'm well aware of the fact; but what can I do? Talent is too much for me: I cannot resist creating a dish which tempts me. These guests of mine always know what's being served, they can tell if it's me or my wife who handles the saucepans. And what's the result? Out of the sixty guests I would see around my table every dinner in the days when I founded this wretched restaurant, no more than twenty come today, and most of those dine on credit, thanks to me! The Piedmontese and the Savoyards have left, but the connoisseurs, the people of taste, the true Italians have stayed with me. And for them I would make any sacrifice! I often give them a dinner for twenty-five sous a head that costs me twice as much to make!"

Signor Giardini's aria was so redolent of naïve Neapolitan cunning that the delighted count imagined he was back at a puppet theater.

"If that's the case, my dear host," he replied to the chef quite familiarly, "since chance and your confidences have revealed the secret of your daily sacrifices, permit me to double the sum I pay you." As he

spoke these words, Andrea spun a forty-franc piece on the stove, out of which munificence Signor Giardini religiously returned two francs fifty centimes, not without various discreet gestures which delighted the young nobleman.

"In a few minutes," Giardini continued, "you will see your *donnina*. I'll seat you next to the husband, and if you want to be in his good graces, talk music. I've invited both of them, poor souls! Because of the New Year, I've created a special dish in which I believe I've surpassed myself..."

Signor Giardini's voice was drowned out by the noisy greetings of the guests who arrived quite capriciously, in pairs and singly, following the custom of the table d'hôte. Giardini chose to stand near the count, in order to point out his regular customers. He was determined by his comic turns to bring a smile to the lips of a man whom his Neapolitan instincts identified as a rich patron ripe for plucking.

"That man," he said, "is a poor composer who'd like to abandon ballads for opera, but he can't manage it. He complains about directors, about music dealers, about everyone except himself, and of course he has no crueler enemy. You see what a florid complexion he has, what chubby self-satisfaction, how little effort there is in his features—appropriate for ballads but nothing else. The man who's with him, the one who looks like a match seller, is one of our greatest musical celebrities, Gigelmi, the greatest orchestra conductor in all Italy; but he's gone deaf and now he's ending his days in misery, deprived of the very thing that made his life so beautiful. Oh! Here comes our great Ottoboni, the most naïve old man on earth, but suspected of being the wildest of all those lunatics conspiring to regenerate Italy. I wonder how such a lovable old man could ever be banished?"

Here Giardini glanced at the count, who, realizing he was being interrogated as to his political allegiances, withdrew into an impassivity altogether Italian.

"A man obliged to cook for the world must deny himself political opinions, *eccellenza*," the chef announced as he continued. "But at the sight of this good man, who resembles a sheep much more than a lion, everyone would say just what I think about him to the Austrian ambassador himself! For that matter, these are times when liberty is no longer proscribed—her turn will come again! Or so these good souls believe," he whispered in the count's ear, "and why should I dash their hopes? Though I, *eccellenza*, I myself have nothing against absolutism: every great talent is absolutist! Well, though Ottoboni has genius, he takes incredible pains for the education of Italy, composes pamphlets to enlighten children and the laboring classes, and apparently has no difficulty smuggling this literature into Italy, making every effort to reawaken the conscience of our poor country, which prefers pleasure to freedom, perhaps with good reason!"

The count's expression remained so impassive that the chef could discover no clue to his true political opinions.

"Ottoboni," resumed Giardini, "is a saintly man, always ready to help others, beloved by all the refugees, for as you know, *eccellenza*, a liberal may possess virtues! Ah! There's a journalist," he said, indicating a man dressed in the absurd costume once attributed to poets in attics, for his suit was threadbare, his boots cracked, his hat greasy, and his overcoat in a state of deplorable decay. "That poor man, *eccellenza*, is full of talent and...incorruptible! He's living in the wrong period: he tells everyone the truth, and no one can bear him. He covers the theater for two obscure papers, though he's educated enough to write for the big dailies. Poor fellow! The others aren't worth your notice; *vossignoria* will soon discover who they are," he said, realizing that at the sight of the composer's wife the count was no longer listening to him.

Seeing Andrea, Signora Marianna gave a start and her cheeks turned bright red.

"Here he is," Giardini murmured, squeezing the count's arm and indicating a very tall man. "You see how pale he is, how serious, poor fellow! His hobbyhorse didn't run today."

Andrea's amorous fantasies were suddenly disturbed by the spell Gambara's presence cast upon any artistic nature. The composer was in his early forties, but though his broad forehead from which the hair had receded was furrowed by shallow wrinkles, though a network of blue veins tinged the transparent skin over his hollow temples, though his heavy-lidded dark eyes were sunk deep in their sockets, the lower part of his face, with its calm lines and gentle contours, gave him every appearance of youth. Even a casual observer could see that this man's passions had been sacrificed to intellect, which alone had aged in some tremendous struggle. Andrea quickly glanced at Marianna, who was watching him. At the sight of her lovely Italian head, its perfect proportions and splendid coloring attesting to one of those organisms in which every human impulse is harmoniously balanced, he measured the abyss separating these two beings chance had united. Pleased by the portent of this disparity between husband and wife, Andrea abandoned any attempt to oppose the sentiment that might raise a barrier between the lovely Marianna and himself. Already, perceiving the calm and steadfast sorrow in Gambara's melancholy gaze, he entertained a kind of respectful pity for this husband whose sole blessing was his wife. Having expected, from Giardini's description, the sort of grotesque personage so often encountered in German legends and opera libretti, here

was a simple and reserved man whose manners and bearing, quite free of eccentricity, possessed a nobility all their own. Without presenting a trace of luxury, his clothes were more seemly than his extreme poverty warranted, and his immaculate linen testified to the affectionate care that ministered to every detail of his life. With moist eyes, Andrea glanced warmly at Marianna, who did not blush, and her half smile expressed the pride such mute homage inspired. Too beguiled to miss the least indication of a response, the count imagined himself loved, now that he saw how well he was understood. Henceforth he devoted himself to the conquest of the husband rather than of the wife, training all his batteries on poor Gambara who, suspecting nothing, was gulping down Signor Giardini's *bocconi* without even tasting them. The count opened the conversation with some banal question, but from Gambara's first reply he realized that the man's intelligence, possibly blind on one point, was extremely clear-sighted on all others, and decided that his strategy must not be to flatter this inspired simpleton's obsessions but rather to attempt to understand his ideas.

The other guests, a famished crew whose wit awakened at the prospect of any meal, good or bad, betrayed a distinct hostility to poor Gambara, only waiting for the second course to give free rein to their abuse. One refugee, whose ogling betrayed a particular intention with regard to Marianna and who supposed he would make his way into her favors by intensifying the general mockery of her husband, opened fire by familiarizing the newcomer with the procedures of the table d'hôte.

"How long it's been since we've heard anything about that *Mohammed* opera of yours!" he exclaimed, grinning at Marianna. "Could it be that Paolo Gambara, caught up in the toils of domestic life and absorbed by the charms of the hearth, is neglecting that superhuman gift of his, while his genius grows cold and his imagination lukewarm?"

Gambara knew all the guests, and believed he dwelt in a sphere so superior to theirs that he no longer bothered to repel their attacks; he made no answer.

"Not everyone," continued the journalist, "possesses sufficient intelligence to understand monsieur's musical lucubrations, which is doubtless what keeps our divine maestro from presenting his works to our good Parisians."

"However," observed the composer of ballads, who previously had opened his mouth only to gulp down whatever was put into it, "I know men of talent who actually commend the judgment of 'our good Parisians.' I myself have some reputation as a musician," he added modestly, "which at present I owe to no more than my little vaudeville tunes and the success of my quadrilles in the salons; but I fully expect to complete, in the near future, a requiem mass composed for the anniversary of Beethoven's death, which I believe will be better understood in Paris than anywhere else. Will monsieur do me the honor of coming to hear it?" he inquired of Andrea.

"Thank you," the count replied. "I am not endowed with organs requisite for the appreciation of French vocal music. But if you were dead, monsieur, and Beethoven had written the requiem, I should not fail to come and hear it."

This observation put an end to the skirmishes of those attempting to rouse Gambara to the defense of his obsessions for the newcomer's amusement. Already Andrea was feeling some reluctance to expose so noble and so touching a mania to such vulgar judgments. He pursued without any ulterior motive a rambling discussion with the composer, in the course of which Signor Giardini's nose was frequently interposed between their remarks. Each time Gambara uttered some lively witticism or some paradoxical notion, the chef would thrust his head forward, dart a pitying glance at the composer, then one of connivance at the count, whispering in the latter's ear: "*È matto!*" A moment came when the chef interrupted these judicious observations in order to attend to the second course, to which he attached great importance.

During his brief absence, Gambara murmured to Andrea: "Our good Giardini threatens us today with a dish of his own concoction which I advise you to respect, though it is his wife who has overseen its preparation. The poor fellow has an obsession with culinary innovations. He has ruined himself in gastronomic experiments, the last of which obliged him to quit Rome without a passport, a circumstance he never mentions. After buying a famous restaurant there, he was engaged to prepare a dinner to be given by a newly installed cardinal whose household was not yet complete. Giardini regarded this as an occasion to distinguish himself, and succeeded: that very evening, accused of having attempted to poison the entire conclave, he was obliged to leave Rome and Italy without packing his trunks. This misfortune cost him what remained of his wits, and now..."

Gambara held a finger to the middle of his forehead and shook his head. "In every other respect," he added, "he's a fine fellow. My wife tells me we are under many obligations to him."

Giardini reappeared, carefully bearing a platter he placed in the center of the table, after which he came and seated himself, modestly enough, beside Andrea, who was served first. No sooner had the count tasted this dish than he found an impassable gulf yawned between the first mouthful and the second. He was

greatly embarrassed, being anxious not to displease the chef, who was watching him closely. Indifferent though a French chef may be to the unfavorable reception of a dish certain to be paid for, the same reaction cannot be assumed on the part of an Italian *trattore*, who frequently finds mere praise insufficient. To gain time, Andrea complimented Giardini warmly, but at the same time leaned toward the chef's ear, slipped him a gold piece under the table, and requested him to go buy several bottles of champagne, leaving him free to take credit for this generosity.

When Giardini reappeared, every plate was empty, and the room resounded with his praises. The champagne soon heated these Italian temperaments, and the conversation, hitherto restrained by a stranger's presence, overflowed the barriers of suspicious reserve to cover the broad fields of political and artistic theory. Andrea, who was given to no other intoxications than those of love and poetry, soon made himself master of the table's attention and skillfully diverted the discussion to musical questions.

"Be so good as to tell me, monsieur," he inquired of the composer of dance music, "how the Napoleon of ballroom tunes can deign to dethrone Palestrina, Pergolesi, and Mozart, those poor wretches who must retreat at the approach of this overwhelming requiem?"

"Monsieur," the composer replied, "a musician always finds it embarrassing to reply when his answer requires the cooperation of a hundred skillful performers. Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven are nothing at all without an orchestra."

"Nothing at all?" the count repeated. "But all the world knows that the immortal creator of *Don Giovanni* and the *Requiem* was named Mozart, and I have the misfortune to be ignorant of what the fecund deviser of so many fashionable quadrilles calls himself."

"Music exists independently of its execution," put in the orchestra leader, who despite his deafness had caught several words of the discussion. "When a musician opens Beethoven's C-Minor Symphony, he is immediately transported into the world of fantasy on the golden wings of the theme in G-natural, repeated in E by the horns. He sees all nature illuminated by dazzling sheaves of fire, darkened by clouds of melancholy, animated by divine paeans."

"Beethoven is passé," said the ballad composer disdainfully.

"He has not yet been understood," the count said, "so how could he be passé?" Here Gambara drank a full glass of champagne and accompanied the libation with an approving half smile. "Beethoven," the count continued, "has transcended the limits of instrumental music, and no one has followed in his wake."

Gambara protested by a shake of his head.

"His works are notable for the simplicity of their plan, and for the way that plan is followed," the count continued. "In the works of most composers, the wild and disorderly orchestral parts blend to only momentary effect, and do not always unite with the whole of the piece by the regularity of their progress. In Beethoven, the effects are distributed, so to speak, in advance. Like the different regiments which contribute by regular movements to winning the battle, the orchestral parts of Beethoven symphonies follow the orders given in the general interest, and are subordinated to plans admirably conceived. There is a similarity, in this respect, with the works of a genius in another genre: in Walter Scott's magnificent historical compositions, the character most external to the action arrives, at a given moment, by means of certain threads woven into the texture of the plot, to join in at the denouement."

"*É vero!*" observed Gambara, whose common sense appeared to return in inverse proportion to his sobriety.

Seeking to make a further test of Gambara's wisdom, Andrea momentarily forgot all his sympathies and began to attack Rossini's European reputation, questioning the victory the Italian school has won nightly over the last thirty years in a hundred opera houses throughout Europe. He had his work cut out for him, certainly, for at his first words there rose around him a low murmur of disapproval; but neither interruptions nor exclamations nor scowls nor pitying glances could quell the fanatical admirer of Beethoven.

"Just compare," he argued, "this man's sublime productions with the music, as it is called, of the Italian school: what inertia of thought, what flaccidity of style! Those uniform phrases, that banality of cadence, those eternal fioriture dashed off quite inconsequentially no matter what the situation, that monotonous crescendo which Rossini has made fashionable and which is today an integral part of any and every composition, and lastly those nightingale trills which constitute a sort of chattering, aromatic music which has no merit but the singer's degree of vocal agility. The Italian school has lost sight of art's lofty mission. Instead of raising the crowd to its level, it has lowered itself to the crowd's, and achieved its popularity only by accepting the suffrage of universal applause, appealing to the vulgar intelligence which is of course in the majority. This vogue is no more than a street-corner sleight of hand. Indeed, Rossini's compositions, which personify this music, like the works of all the composers who to some degree derive from him, strike me as worthy at best to collect an audience around an organ-grinder and to accompany the capers of a

Punchinello. I even prefer French music to that—how could I say more? All hail the music of Germany... whenever it learns to sing," he added in a low voice.

This sally summed up an extended argument Andrea had sustained for over a quarter of an hour in the loftiest regions of metaphysics with the ease of a somnambulist walking on the rooftops. Intensely interested in such subtleties, Gambara had not missed a word of the entire discussion; he began speaking as soon as Andrea seemed to have left off, at which point the guests, several of whom had been about to leave the room, began to pay attention again.

"You have much to say against the Italian school," Gambara observed, considerably enlivened by champagne, "which means little enough to me, in any case. Thank God, I have nothing to do with these more or less melodic trivialities! But as a man of the world, you show scant gratitude to this classic land from which Germany and France learned their first lessons. While the compositions of Carissimi, Cavalli, Scarlatti, and Rossi were performed throughout Italy, the violinists of the Paris Opéra had the singular privilege of performing on their instruments wearing gloves! Lully, who expanded the realm of harmony and was the first to classify the various dissonances, managed to find, on his arrival in France, only a cook and a mason who had adequate voices and sufficient intelligence to perform his music; he made a tenor out of the former, and transformed the latter into a bass. At the time, Germany, with the exception of Sebastian Bach, knew nothing of music. But, monsieur," added Gambara in the humble tone of a man who fears his words will be received with scorn or hostility, "though young, you must have given long study to these high questions of art, otherwise you could not have stated them so clearly."

This remark caused some of his audience to smile, for they had understood nothing of the distinctions Andrea had established; Giardini, convinced that the count had merely led Gambara on by chattering at random, nudged Andrea with a surreptitious grin at the hoax in which he was delighted to participate.

"Much of what you've just told us seems to me quite reasonable," continued Gambara, "but take care! The case you make against Italian sensuality strikes me as tending toward German idealism, which is a heresy no less deadly. If men of reason and imagination like yourself merely desert one camp for the other, if they cannot remain neutral between the two excesses, we shall eternally suffer the ironies of those sophists who deny all progress, and who might compare human genius to that cloth which, too short to spread over the whole of Signor Giardini's dinner table, covers one end at the other's expense."

Giardini started in his chair as if stung by a horse-fly, but a sudden reflection restored him to his hostly dignity, and he raised his eyes to heaven and again nudged the count, who was beginning to regard his host as madder than Gambara, whose grave and semireligious manner of discussing music fascinated the Milanese nobleman to the highest degree. Sitting between these two mad creatures, one so noble and the other so vulgar, so mutually contradictory, to the company's great entertainment, the count momentarily felt tossed between the sublime and the ridiculous, those two masks of all human creation. Breaking then the chain of incredible developments which had led him into this smoky den, he found himself the victim of a strange hallucination, and began to consider Gambara and Giardini as no more than two abstractions.

Yet after a final jeer from the orchestra leader in reply to Gambara, the guests had left the room amid roars of laughter. Giardini withdrew to prepare the coffee he wished to offer his distinguished visitor, and his wife cleared the table. The count, sitting near the stove between Marianna and Gambara, was in precisely the situation this madman had declared to be so desirable: on his left, sensuality, on his right, idealism. Gambara, encountering for the first time a man who did not laugh in his face, wasted no time in generalities but began speaking of himself, his life, his works, and the musical regeneration of which he believed himself to be the Messiah.

"Hear me, you who have not scoffed so far! I should like to tell you something of my life, not to make a show of the perseverance for which I claim no credit, but for the greater glory of One who has instilled His strength within me. You seem a good and reverent man—if you have no faith in me, at least you will take pity on me: pity is human, faith divine."

Andrea, blushing, drew back under his chair the foot which had been endeavoring to touch Marianna's, and focused all his attention on her while listening to Gambara.

"I was born in Cremona; my father was a violin maker, a considerable performer but a much better composer. So I was fortunate enough to learn in early youth the laws of musical construction in its double form, material and spiritual, and to make, as an inquisitive child, certain observations which were subsequently represented in the mind of the grown man. The French invasion drove us, father and son, from our home. We were ruined by the war. From the age of ten, I thus entered upon that wandering existence to which are doomed most men who have conceived innovations in art, science, or politics. Fate or the disposition of their minds, which fails to fit the pigeonholes of bourgeois existence, leads them providentially to the places where they must receive their instruction. Driven by my passion for music, I labored in theater after theater all over Italy, living on little or nothing, as one can there. Sometimes I

played the bass in an orchestra, sometimes I found myself in the chorus, or under the boards with the stagehands. Thus I studied music in all its aspects, questioning each instrument and the human voice, learning how they differed and how they harmonized, listening to scores and applying the laws my father had taught me. Frequently I traveled through the country mending instruments. It was a life without bread, in a country where the sun always shines and art is omnipresent, but where there is no money for the artist, ever since Rome ceased to be—except in name only—queen of the Christian world. Sometimes welcomed, sometimes persecuted by my poverty, I never lost courage; I heeded the inner voices which foretold my fame! Music seemed to me in its infancy. That is still my opinion. All that remains to us of the world of music before the seventeenth century proves to me that the ancient composers knew nothing but melody; they were ignorant of harmony and its vast resources. Music is at once a science and an art. Its roots in physics and mathematics make it a science; it becomes an art by inspiration which unconsciously employs the theorems of science. It derives from physics by the very essence of the substance it employs: sound is air modified; air consists of elements, principles which doubtless find within us analogous principles that correspond to them, which sympathize and expand by the power of thought. Thus air must contain certain particles of various elasticity, capable of as many vibrations of diverse duration as there are tones in reverberating bodies, and these particles perceived by our ear, set working by the musician, correspond to certain ideas, depending on our various human organizations. To my mind, the nature of sound is identical with that of light. Sound is light in another form: both proceed by vibrations which man transforms into thought within his nerve centers. Music, like painting, employs bodies which have the faculty of releasing one or another property of the mother-substance, out of which pictures are composed. In music, instruments do the work of the colors the painter employs. Since every sound produced by a reverberating body is always accompanied by its major third and fifth, and affects grains of sand spread out on a stretched piece of parchment so as to form figures of unvarying geometrical construction, according to the different volumes of sound—regular when a harmony is achieved, and without exact forms when dissonances are produced—I say that music is an art woven in the very bowels of Nature. Music obeys physical and mathematical laws. The physical laws are little known, the mathematical laws are better known; and, ever since we have begun studying their relations, we have created the harmony to which we owe Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Rossini, splendid geniuses who have certainly produced a music nearer perfection than that of their predecessors, those men of earlier times whose genius is nonetheless incontestable. The old masters sang instead of invoking art and science, that noble alliance which unites the beauty of melodies and the power of harmony. Now, if the discovery of the mathematical laws has produced these four great musicians, what heights could we not attain if we were to find the physical laws by virtue of which—consider this!—we collect in greater or lesser quantities, according to proportions still to be established, a certain ethereal substance, diffused within the air, which affords us music as well as light, the phenomena of vegetation as well as those of zoology! Do you understand? These new laws would arm the composer with new powers, offering him instruments superior to those he has now, and perhaps a more wondrous harmony compared to the one which governs music today. If each modulated tone corresponds to a power, we must know that power in order to conjugate all these forces according to their true laws. Composers are working on substances of which they are ignorant. Why do instruments made of wood and metal, the bassoon and the horn, for example, resemble each other so little while employing the same substances, that is: the constituent gases of the atmosphere? Their dissimilarities proceed from some decomposition of these gases, or from an apprehension of their particular principles which modulate by virtue of unknown faculties. If we knew those faculties, science and art would have much to gain! Well, I have traced such discoveries; I have actually made them! Yes!” exclaimed Gambara, becoming tremendously excited. “Hitherto man has merely noted effects rather than causes! If he were to penetrate the causes, music would become the greatest of all the arts. Is it not the art which penetrates the soul most deeply? We see only what painting shows us, we hear only what the poet tells us, music goes far beyond that: Does it not form your very thoughts, does it not waken torpid memories? Here you have a thousand souls in a hall, a single phrase leaps from Pasta’s throat, her execution corresponding perfectly to the ideas flashing in Rossini’s soul when he wrote his aria, and Rossini’s phrase transmitted to those thousand souls develops into a thousand different poems: to one person it reveals itself as a woman long desired, to another some shore along which he has walked under trailing willows—the lapping waves and the hopes that danced under those leafy bowers; one woman remembers a thousand feelings which tormented her during an hour of jealousy; another summons up the unfulfilled longings of her heart and conceives in the rich colors of her dreams an ideal being to whom she surrenders with all the ardor of the figure caressing her fantasy in the Roman mosaic; another anticipates that this very night she will realize her desire, and plunges already into the torrent of pleasures, receiving their tide upon her fiery breast. Music alone has the power to make us return to our inmost selves, while the other arts give us only specific, only limited

pleasures. But I am wandering far afield. These were my first ideas, quite vague at that, for an inventor merely glimpses a sort of dawn. Yet I carried these glorious ideas at the bottom of my wallet; they comforted me amply for having nothing to eat but dry crusts I dipped in the wayside fountains. I worked, I composed melodies, and after performing them on some instrument or other, I resumed my travels through Italy. Finally, at the age of twenty-two, I came to live in Venice, where for the first time I knew peace and found myself in a tolerable situation. Here I made the acquaintance of an old Venetian nobleman who enjoyed my ideas, who encouraged me in my pursuits, and who gave me employment at the Tetra la Fenice. Life was cheap, lodgings cost little—I occupied an apartment in that same Palazzo Capello from which, one night, the celebrated Bianca emerged to become the Grand Duchess of Tuscany. I imagined that my unknown glory would similarly emerge some day, to be similarly crowned. I spent my evenings at the theater and my days at work. I suffered a disaster: the performance of my first opera, *The Martyrs*, in which I had experimented with my new ideas, was a fiasco. None of my music was understood—give Beethoven to the Italians, and they won't have a clue! No one in Venice had the patience to wait for an effect prepared by various motifs which each instrument played separately and which were to come together in an ultimate harmony. I had great expectations for that opera of mine, for we always believe success is within our grasp, we lovers of the blue goddess Hope! If you believe yourself destined to achieve great things, it is difficult not to feel they are coming your way; there are always chinks in the dark lantern, through which the light gleams. In that same palazzo lived a family, my wife's family, and the hope of winning Marianna's hand—for she had often smiled at me from her window—contributed not a little to my efforts. I sank into a deep depression as I measured the depth of the abyss into which I had fallen, for I clearly envisioned a life of poverty and constant struggle which would be the death of love. Marianna did as genius does: she leaped with both feet over all our difficulties. I shall not tell you of the meager happiness which gilded the beginning of my misfortunes. Terrified by my failure, I decided that Italy, dull of comprehension and slumbering in the folderol of routine, was hardly disposed to welcome such innovations as I was meditating; therefore my thoughts turned to Germany. In traveling to that country, to which I made my way through Hungary, I listened to the thousand voices of nature and strove to reproduce her sublime harmonies by means of instruments I invented or altered to that end. Such efforts involved vast expense which soon absorbed our modest savings. Yet these were our finest days: I was appreciated in Germany. Nothing in my life has been finer than this period. Incomparable indeed were the tumultuous sensations which overwhelmed me at Marianna's side: her beauty at that time was in all its glory and its heavenly power. Need I say that I was happy? During these hours of weakness, more than once I made the language of earthly harmonies speak to my passion. I managed to compose several of those melodies which resemble geometrical figures and are greatly prized in the world you live in. As soon as I had attained some success, insuperable obstacles were put in my path by my colleagues, all of whom were envenomed by bad faith or ineptitude. I had heard France spoken of as a country where innovations were favorably received, and determined to proceed there; my wife mustered the resources and we came to Paris. Hitherto no one had ever laughed in my face; but in this dreadful city I have had to endure this new kind of torment, to which destitution soon added its anguish. Reduced to taking lodgings in this polluted neighborhood, we have lived for several months entirely by Marianna's labor, for she has put her needle at the service of the miserable prostitutes who make this street their gallery. Marianna tells me she is treated with deference and generosity by these poor women, which I attribute to the influence of a virtue so pure that vice itself is obliged to respect it."

"You must not lose hope," said Andrea. "Perhaps you have reached the end of your ordeals. Until my efforts, united with yours, have brought your works to the world's attention, surely you will permit a compatriot, an artist like yourself, to offer you some advance on the inevitable success of your scores."

"Anything that concerns the conditions of material life is in my wife's hands," Gambara answered. "She will decide what we can accept without shame from a man of honor such as you appear to be. For myself, it has been a long time since I have indulged in such extended confidences, and I ask your permission to take my leave. I feel a melody beckoning me, it passes before me, dancing the while, naked and shivering like a lovely girl who begs her lover for the garments he has hidden from her. Farewell! I must go and dress my mistress; I leave my wife with you."

Gambara made his escape like a man who reproaches himself for wasting precious time, and Marianna, in some embarrassment, attempted to follow him; Andrea dared not retain her, but Giardini came to their rescue. "You heard him, signora," he said. "Your husband has left you more than one affair to settle with *il signor conte.*"

Marianna sat down again, but without lifting her eyes to look at Andrea, who hesitated to speak to her.

"Signor Gambara's confidence in me," Andrea said with emotion, "surely deserves his wife's as well. Will the lovely Marianna refuse to tell me the story of her own life?"

“My life,” Marianna replied, “is no more than the life of ivy on a wall. And as for the story of my heart, you must think me as devoid of pride as of modesty if you ask me to tell you that, after what you have just heard.”

“And from whom should I ask to hear it?” cried the count, passion already dimming his wits.

“From yourself,” Marianna replied. “Either you have already understood me, or you will never do so. Try asking yourself.”

“I shall, but you must hear me out. This hand which I take in mine—leave it there as long as you recognize my version as the truth.”

“I’m listening,” Marianna said.

“A woman’s life begins with her first passion,” Andrea said, “and my dear Marianna’s began only on the day she saw Paolo Gambara for the first time; she required a true passion to relish, and above all some interesting weakness to protect and support. The fine feminine organization with which she is endowed is less drawn to love, perhaps, than to maternity. You sigh, Marianna? I have touched one of your heart’s living wounds. What a fine role it was for you to play, young as you were, that of the guardian of a fine mind gone astray. You told yourself: Paolo will be my genius, I shall be his reason, and together we shall compose that semidivine being known as an angel, a sublime creature who delights and comprehends, in whom virtue and wisdom never stifle love. Then, in the first bloom of youth, you heard the myriad voices of nature which the poet sought to reproduce. Great was your enthusiasm when Paolo spread before you all the treasures of poetry while seeking their formula in the sublime but limited language of music, and you admired him even as a delirious exaltation carried him far away from you, for you wanted to believe that all this errant energy would eventually be returned to love. You knew nothing of the jealous tyranny thought exerts over minds obsessed with it. Gambara had surrendered himself, before ever knowing you, to that proud and vindictive mistress against whom you have vainly struggled to this very day. For one moment you glimpsed happiness: fallen from the heights where his mind continually soared, Paolo was amazed to find reality so sweet, and you supposed that his obsession would relax its grip in love’s arms. But soon music and the idea of music reclaimed its victim. The dazzling mirage which had suddenly transported you amid the joys of mutual passion darkened the solitary path you were now condemned to follow. In the account your husband has just given, as in the striking contrast between your features and his, I have glimpsed the secret anguish of your life, the painful mysteries of this ill-matched union in which you have received the sufferer’s share. If your conduct was always heroic, if your energy never flagged in the exercise of your arduous duties, perhaps in the silence of your solitary nights, that heart whose rhythm echoed so desperately in your breast protested more than once! Your cruelest torment was your husband’s very greatness: had he been less noble, less pure, you might have abandoned him; but his virtues sustained your own. Between your heroism and his, you wondered who would be the last to yield. You pursued the true greatness of your task, as Paolo Gambara pursued his chimera. If love of duty alone had sustained and guided you, perhaps triumph would have seemed easier; it would have sufficed to stifle your heart and to transport your life into the world of abstractions, religion would have absorbed the rest, and you would have lived within an idea, the way holy women extinguish nature’s instincts at the foot of the altar. But the charm that suffused your Paolo’s entire person, the elevation of his mind, the rare and touching evidences of his tenderness continually cast you out of this ideal world where virtue sought to keep you, arousing forces ceaselessly exhausted by the struggle against love’s phantom. And still you did not doubt! The least gleams of hope lured you in pursuit of your sweet chimera. Finally, the years of disappointment have caused you to lose the patience an angel would have foresworn long since. Today, that ideal so long pursued is only a shadow and no longer a body. The madness so close to genius must be incurable in this world. Obsessed by this realization, you considered your entire youth to have been sacrificed, if not wasted; bitterly you acknowledged nature’s mistake in having given you a father when you sought a husband. You wondered if you have not exceeded the duties of a wife in dedicating yourself so loyally to a man wedded only to science. Marianna, leave your hand in mine; everything I have said is true. And you have searched everywhere for comfort, for consolation; but you are in Paris now, and not in Italy where men and women know so well how to love.”

“Oh, let me end the tale!” Marianna exclaimed. “I prefer to say such things myself. I shall be frank; I feel I am speaking to my best friend. Yes, it was in Paris that all that you have so clearly explained actually happened; but when I saw you, I was saved, for until then I had nowhere encountered the love dreamed of since my childhood. The way I lived, even the way I dressed shielded me from the notice of men like you. The few young men whose situation kept them from insulting me became still more odious in my eyes because of the coarseness with which they treated me: either they patronized my husband as an absurd old man, or they treacherously sought to get into his good graces in order to betray him. All of them tried to persuade me to leave him; none understood my reverence for this soul, so remote from us only because it is

so near heaven, this friend, this brother I long to serve forever! Only you have understood the ties that bind me to him—tell me you have taken a sincere interest in my Paolo, without ulterior motives..."

"I accept your praise," Andrea interrupted, "but don't go too far, don't force me to deceive you. I love you, Marianna, as we love in that beautiful country where we were both born; I love you with all my soul and all my power, but before offering you this love, I must show myself worthy of yours. I shall make one last effort to restore to you the man you've loved since childhood, the man you'll always love. Until success or defeat, accept without embarrassment the comfort I want to give you both; tomorrow you and I will find suitable lodgings for him. Do you esteem me enough to permit me a share in your guardianship?"

Amazed by this generosity, Marianna once again gave her hand to the count, who then left the house endeavoring to avoid the effusive civilities of Giardini and his wife.

The next day, the count was ushered by Giardini into Gambara's apartment. Though already convinced of her lover's high-mindedness, for certain souls are prompt to understand, Marianna was too good a housekeeper not to betray her embarrassment at receiving so great a gentleman in so wretched a room. Yet everything in it was spotless. She had spent the entire morning dusting the strange furniture, the handiwork of Signor Giardini, who had employed his leisure moments making such items out of the scraps of instruments Gambara had discarded. Andrea had never seen anything so peculiar in all his life. In order to preserve the semblance of gravity, he was compelled to look away from the grotesque bed the ingenious chef had fashioned out of the case of an old spinet, and turned instead to Marianna's narrow cot, its simple mattress covered with white muslin, which suggested thoughts at once melancholy and delightful. Andrea wanted to discuss his plans and the rest of the day's schedule, but the enthusiastic Gambara, realizing he had at last encountered a willing listener, buttonholed the count and forced him to listen to the opera he had written for Paris.

"To begin with, monsieur," said Gambara, "permit me to inform you of the subject in a few words. Here in Paris, those who receive musical impressions do not evolve them within themselves, as religion teaches us to develop holy texts by prayer; hence it is difficult to make such persons understand that there exists an eternal music in nature, a flowing melody, a perfect harmony, troubled only by revolutions independent of the divine will, as the passions are independent of human will. I therefore had to find an immense frame to contain both effects and causes, for my music's goal is to offer a representation of the life of nations conceived from the loftiest perspective. My opera—whose libretto I also composed, for a poet would never have developed such a subject—deals with the life of Mohammed, a figure who joined the magic of ancient Sabaeanism to the Oriental poetry of the Jewish religion, producing one of the greatest of human poems, the dominion of the Arabs. Doubtless Mohammed borrowed from the Jews the notion of absolute government, and from the pastoral or Sabaean religions the roving spirit which has created the brilliant empire of the caliphs. His destiny was inscribed in his very birth—his father was a pagan and his mother a Jewess. Ah, to be a great musician, my dear count, one must also be very learned. Without culture, without local color, there are no ideas in music. The composer who sings for singing's sake is an artisan, not an artist. This magnificent opera of mine continues the great work I had already undertaken. My first opera was called *The Martyrs*, and I plan to create a third one on the subject of *Jerusalem Delivered*. You must understand the beauty of this triple composition and the diversity of its resources: *The Martyrs*, *Mohammed*, *Jerusalem Delivered*! The God of the West, the God of the East, and the struggle of their religions around a tomb. But let us speak no more of my lost splendors—lost forever! Here is the argument of my opera."

There was a pause, and then Gambara resumed: "The first act shows Mohammed living as a sort of middle-man in the house of Khadijah, a rich widow to whom his uncle introduced him; he is in love and ambitious; driven from Mecca, he flees to Medina, and dates his era from that flight (the Hegira). The second act shows Mohammed as a prophet founding a warrior religion. Act three presents Mohammed turning away from all experience, having exhausted life, and concealing the secret of his death in order to become a God, the last effort of human pride. Now you will be able to judge my method of expressing by sound a great subject which poetry renders only imperfectly in words."

Gambara sat down at his piano with a meditative expression, and his wife brought him the huge album of his score, which he never opened.

"The whole opera," he observed, "is built on a bass line as on a rich terrain. Hence Mohammed must have a majestic bass voice, and his first wife must be a contralto. Khadijah was no longer young—she was twenty. Now listen, here's the overture! It begins (in C-minor, andante, three-four time). Do you hear the sadness of an ambitious man whom love cannot satisfy? Through his laments, by a transition to a related key (E-flat, allegro, four-four time), we hear the cries of the impassioned epileptic, his ravings, as well as several warrior motifs, for the omnipotent saber of the caliphs begins to flash before his eyes. The many beauties of his one wife afford that same feeling of love's plurality we find so striking in *Don Giovanni*. Hearing these motifs, you get a glimpse of Mohammed's paradise, don't you? But here (A-flat major, six-

eight time) there is a cantabile to delight even the most unmusical soul: Khadijah has understood Mohammed! She informs the people of the prophet's conferences with the Angel Gabriel (maestoso sostenuto, in F-minor). The magistrates and priests, who feel this newcomer has attacked them, just as Socrates and Christ attacked dying or worn-out governments and religions, pursue Mohammed and drive him out of Mecca (stretto, in C-major). Then comes my lovely dominant (in G, four-four time): Arabia hears her prophet, the horsemen arrive (G-major, E-flat, B-flat, G-minor, all in four-four time). The human avalanche swells! The false prophet has begun to practice on a tribe what he will impose on the world (G, G). He promises the Arabs universal dominion, and he is believed because he is inspired. The crescendo begins (with the same dominant). We hear several fanfares (in C-major), brasses worked into the harmony which will express the initial victories. Medina is conquered by the prophet, who marches on Mecca (an explosion in C-major). The orchestra's powers spread like wildfire, each instrument speaks, we hear torrents of harmony. Suddenly the tutti is interrupted by a graceful theme (minor thirds). Do you hear the last cantilena of devotion? The woman who has sustained the great man dies, concealing her despair from him —she dies observing the triumph of a man for whom love has become too vast to limit itself to one woman, and she adores him enough to sacrifice herself to the greatness which extinguishes her! A conflagration of love! And here the desert invades the entire world (C-major again). The orchestra's full forces return in a terrible fifth of the fundamental bass which dies away—Mohammed is weary, he has exhausted all things! And this is the man who sought to die as God? Arabia worships him and prays, and we return to my first theme of melancholy at the very beginning (C-minor). Don't you hear in this music," Gambara asked, lifting his hands from the keys and turning around toward the count, "this vivid, jostling, strange, melancholy, and always grand music, the expression of the life of an epileptic frenzied by pleasure, unable to read or write, making his very defects the stepping-stones to his greatness, turning his every fault and failure into triumph? Don't you sense in this overture—a mere sample of the entire opera—some notion of the prophet's seduction of an eager and amorous race?"

Initially calm and severe, the maestro's face, gazing at which Andrea had tried to divine the ideas the chaotic amalgamation of notes kept him from understanding, had gradually become animated, finally assuming an impassioned expression which overwhelmed Marianna and Giardini as well. Powerfully affected by the passages in which she recognized her own situation, Marianna could not conceal her agitation from Andrea. Gambara wiped his brow and glanced so fiercely at the ceiling that his gaze seemed to pierce it and rise into the heavens.

"You've seen the peristyle." he said. "Now we'll enter the palace. The opera begins. First act. Mohammed, alone downstage, sings an aria (in F-natural, four-four time) interrupted by a chorus of camel drivers gathered around a well at the back of the stage (they sing in counterpoint, twelve-eight time). What majestic grief! It touches even the most brainless ladies in the audience, even if they have no hearts. Is it not the very melody of repressed genius?"

To Andrea's great amazement, for Marianna was accustomed to it, Gambara contracted his throat so violently that only choking sounds emerged, rather like those made by a growling watchdog. The froth that whitened the composer's lips made Andrea shudder.

"His wife enters (A-minor). A magnificent duet! In this piece, I show how Mohammed has will, and his wife intelligence. Khadijah announces that she is about to dedicate herself to a project which will deprive her of her young husband's love. Mohammed seeks to conquer the world; his wife has divined his purpose and seconded it by persuading the people of Mecca that her husband's attacks of epilepsy are the effect of his conversation with angels. Chorus of Mohammed's first disciples who come to promise him their support (C-sharp minor, sotto voce). Mohammed exits to converse with the Angel Gabriel (recitative, in F-major). His wife encourages the choir. (Aria with choral accompaniment—sudden outbursts of voices support Khadijah's grand and majestic song in A-major.) Abdullah, the father of Ayesha, the only maiden whom Mohammed has found to be a virgin, and whose name the prophet for this reason changed to Abu-Beker (father of the virgin), comes downstage with Ayesha (singing phrases which dominate the rest of the voices and sustain Khadijah's aria in counterpoint to it). Omar, the father of Hafsah, another maiden whom Mohammed is to possess, follows Abu-Beker's example and steps forward with his daughter to form a quintet. The virgin Ayesha is a first soprano, Hafsah the second; Abu-Beker is a bass, Omar a baritone. Mohammed reenters, inspired. He sings his first bravura aria, which begins the finale (E-major); he promises world dominion to his first Believers. The prophet catches sight of the two maidens, and by a suave transition (from B-major to G-major) he makes love to them in amorous phrases. Ali, Mohammed's cousin, and Khalid, his greatest general, both tenors, enter and announce that persecution of Mohammed and his followers has begun: magistrates, soldiers, and nobles have banished the prophet (recitative). Mohammed invokes the Angel Gabriel (in C), whom he declares to be at his side, and points to a flight of doves. The chorus of Believers responds in accents of devotion on a modulation (in B-major). Soldiers,

magistrates, and nobles enter (march tempo, four-four time, in B-major). Struggle between the two choruses (stretto, in E-major). Mohammed (in a series of descending diminished sevenths) yields to the storm and makes his escape. The dark and savage color of this finale is mitigated by the themes of the three women who prophesy his triumph to Mohammed and whose phrases are developed in the third act, in the scene during which Mohammed relishes the joys of his greatness."

Tears came to Gambara's eyes, and after a moment he exclaimed: "Second act! The new religion is now instituted. The Arabs guard the tent of their prophet who consults God (chorus in A-minor). Mohammed enters (prayer in F). What brilliant and majestic harmony underlies this chant, in which I may have extended the limits of melody. For didn't I have to express the marvels of this great human impulse which created music, architecture, poetry, customs, and manners all of its own? Hearing this composition, you stroll beneath the arcades of the Generalife and through the carved halls of the Alhambra! The fioriture of the melody depict the delicious Moorish architecture and the poetry of this gallant and warlike religion which would combat the warlike and gallant chivalry of the Christians. The brass wakens in the orchestra and heralds the first triumphs (by a broken cadence). The Arabs revere the prophet (E-flat major). The arrival of Khalid, Amru, and Ali—tempo di marcia. The armies of the Believers have taken cities and conquered the three Arabias! Now comes a stately recitative in which Mohammed rewards his generals, giving them his wives. Here," said Gambara in a contemptuous voice, "occurs one of those ignominious ballets which interrupt the noblest musical tragedies! But Mohammed (B-minor) redeems the opera by his great prophecy, which in poor Monsieur Voltaire's version begins with this line:

'Arabia's day has dawned at last...'

"The prophecy is interrupted by a chorus of victorious Arabs (twelve-eight time, allegretto). Trumpets and brasses accompany the various tribes which now enter. A general festivity in which all the voices take up the melody, one after the other, and in which Mohammed proclaims polygamy. Amid this rejoicing, the woman who has served Mohammed so loyally is given a magnificent melody (B-major): 'And I,' she sings, 'am I to be loved no longer?' 'We must part, for you are a woman, and I am a prophet: I may have slaves, but no longer an equal!' Listen to this duet (G-sharp minor). What torments! The woman realizes the greatness to which her own hands have raised him, and loves Mohammed enough to sacrifice herself to his glory; she worships him as a God, without criticism and without complaint. Poor creature, the first dupe and the first victim! What a theme for the finale (B-major), this grief of hers, depicted in dark colors against the background of the chorus's acclamations and the accents of Mohammed abandoning his wife as a useless instrument but acknowledging he will never forget her! What triumphant explosions, what cascades of joyous song uttered by the two young voices (first and second soprano) of Ayesha and Hafsah, supported by Ali and his wife, by Omar and Abu-Beker! Mourn! Rejoice! Triumphs and tears! There's life for you."

Marianna could not restrain her sobs. Andrea was so moved that his eyes filled with tears. The Neapolitan cook, shaken by the magnetism of the ideas expressed by the spasms in Gambara's voice, joined in this show of emotion. The musician turned around, glanced at this group, and smiled. "At last you understand me!" he cried.

Never had a general parading in triumph to the Capitol, amid the purple streamers of glory and the acclamations of an entire people, shown such an expression as he felt the crown pressed upon his forehead. The composer's face shone like that of a holy martyr. No one corrected his misapprehension. A dreadful smile passed over Marianna's lips, and the count was horrified by the naïveté of Gambara's madness.

"Third act!" exclaimed the delighted composer, seating himself again at the piano. "Andantino solo: Mohammed despairs in his seraglio, surrounded by women. Quartet of houris (A-major). What festivities! What songs of happy nightingales! Modulations (F-sharp minor). The theme is heard (first in the dominant E, then transposed to A-major). The pleasures of the senses are brought together and articulated in order to produce a contrast with the somber first-act finale. After the dances, Mohammed rises and sings a grand bravura aria (F-minor), lamenting the unique and devoted love of his first wife and acknowledging himself defeated by polygamy. Never has a musician had such a theme. The orchestra and the chorus of women express the joys of the houris, while Mohammed returns to the melancholy with which the opera began...Where is Beethoven?" cried Gambara. "Where is the one spirit who could understand this mighty return of the opera upon itself? Who else could realize how everything rests upon the bass line? Yet that is how Beethoven constructed his C-Minor Symphony. But his heroic movement is purely instrumental, whereas mine is supported by a sextet of the loveliest human voices and by a chorus of Believers keeping vigil at the gates of the sacred dwelling. Here I have all the riches of melody and of harmony as well, an orchestra and human voices, too! Listen to the expression of all human existence, rich and poor alike! Struggle and triumph and satiation! Ali enters, the Koran is victorious everywhere (duet in D-minor). Mohammed confides in his two fathers-in-law: he is weary of everything, seeks to abdicate and to die in

obscurity, leaving others to consolidate his work. A magnificent sextet (in C-flat major). Mohammed makes his farewells (solo in F-natural). His fathers-in-law, appointed his vicars (caliphs), summon the people. A grand triumphal march. Prayer of the Arabs kneeling before the sacred dwelling (casbah) above which the doves ascend (same key). The prayer intoned by sixty voices, and dominated by women (in B-flat), crowns this gigantic composition in which the life of men and nations is expressed. You have heard every emotion, human and divine."

Andrea gazed at Gambara in amazement. If at first he had been shocked by the horrible irony of this man expressing the sentiments of Mohammed's wife without recognizing them in Marianna, the husband's madness was now eclipsed by the composer's, for there was no hint of a poetic or musical idea in the deafening cacophony which assailed Andrea's ears: the principles of harmony, the most elementary rules of composition were totally alien to this formless creation. Instead of the ingeniously wrought music Gambara had described, his fingers were producing a series of fifths, sevenths, and octaves, of major thirds and progressions of fourths without sixths in the bass—a jumble of discordant sounds flung out at random as though combined to rend the least delicate ear. It is difficult to express this bizarre performance, for new words would be required in order to give a sense of this impossible music. Painfully affected by the composer's madness, Andrea blushed and glanced furtively at Marianna who, pale and with lowered eyes, could not hold back her tears. Amid his racket of notes, Gambara had occasionally uttered exclamations which revealed his soul's enchantment: he swooned with pleasure, smiling at his piano, then frowning with rage, stuck out his tongue in the fashion of the "god possessed," apparently intoxicated with the poetry which filled his head and which he had vainly sought to translate into music. The harrowing discords emerging from his fingers had evidently echoed in his ears as celestial harmonies. Indeed, the inspired gaze of his blue eyes open on another world, the rosy glow suffusing his cheeks, and especially the heavenly serenity which ecstasy cast on his proud and noble features would have convinced a deaf man he was in the presence of an improvisation by some great artist. An illusion all the more natural in that the execution of this meaningless music required marvelous skill in order to master fingering Gambara must have labored over for many years. Nor were his hands alone thus occupied; the complication of the pedals kept his whole body in a state of perpetual agitation. Sweat streamed down his face as he worked at swelling a crescendo with all the insufficient means the wretched instrument afforded him: he stamped, snorted, shouted; his fingers equaled in rapidity the forked tongue of a serpent; and finally, at the piano's last gasp, he flung himself backward, letting his head fall on the back of the chair.

"*Per Bacco!* I am dumbfounded," exclaimed the count as he left the room. "A child dancing on the keys would have made better music."

"Certainly chance alone couldn't avoid the harmony of any two notes together the way this lunatic has managed for the last hour," Giardini asserted.

"How can it be," Andrea wondered aloud, "that Marianna's splendid features haven't altered under the continual assault of such horrible discords? Surely they will make her ugly."

"It is from that danger, signor *conte*, that we must rescue her," cried Giardini.

"Yes," Andrea agreed. "I've been thinking just that. But to make sure my plans have some basis in fact, I must test my suspicions by an experiment. I'll return tomorrow to examine the instruments he has invented. So tomorrow night we'll have a late supper—I'll send the wine and the necessary delicacies."

The chef bowed. Andrea spent the following day arranging the apartment he had chosen for the composer's destitute household. In the evening, he came and found, according to his instructions, the wines and cakes served with a certain delicacy by Marianna and the chef; Gambara triumphantly demonstrated the series of little drums covered with grains of sand or rice, by which he made his observations as to the different natures of the sounds produced by his instruments.

"Do you see," he explained, "by what simple means I manage to prove a major proposition? Acoustic science reveals to me certain actions analogous to sound on all the objects which sound affects. Every harmony originates from a common center and sustains intimate relations with every other; or rather, harmony, which like light, is a unitary phenomenon and can be decomposed by our arts as a ray of light is refracted by a prism."

Then he demonstrated the instruments constructed according to his laws, explaining the changes he was introducing into their framework. Lastly he announced, with a certain solemnity, that he would crown this preliminary session, suitable at best for satisfying visual curiosity, by performing on an instrument which could replace a whole orchestra, and which he called the *Panharmonicon*.

"If it's that thing in the cage which the whole neighborhood complains about when you're working on it," Giardini remarked, "you won't play for us long—the police will be here as soon as you begin. Have you thought of that?"

"If this poor fool remains," Gambara whispered to the count, "it will be impossible for me to perform."

The count sent the chef away by promising him a reward if he would stay outside and keep the police or the neighbors from interfering. The chef, who had not overlooked himself in serving wine to Gambara, readily agreed. Without being drunk, the composer had reached that stage where every intellectual power was overexcited, where the walls of a room become luminous, where garrets have no roofs, and the soul cavorts in the world of spirits. With some difficulty Marianna divested of its wrappings an instrument about the size of a grand piano, but with a second keyboard above the first. This strange mechanism was also furnished with stops for several kinds of wind instruments and the sharp angles of several metal tubes.

"Would you be so kind," asked the count, "as to play for me that prayer you said was so fine—the one which concludes your opera?"

To Marianna's amazement as well as the count's, Gambara began with several chords which disclosed a great master; their amazement gave way to an initial admiration mixed with surprise, then to complete ecstasy during which they forgot both the place and the man. The orchestral effects would not have been so overwhelming had it not been for the sounds of wind instruments which recalled the organ and united wonderfully with the harmonic riches of the string instruments; but the imperfect state of this singular machine hindered the composer's performance, though his intentions seemed all the greater for that. Frequently perfection in works of art keeps the soul from raising them to greater heights. Is this not the victory of the sketch over the finished picture, in the judgment of those capable of completing the work by taking thought, instead of accepting it readymade? The purest and sweetest music the count had ever heard rose from Gambara's fingers like a cloud of incense above an altar. The composer's voice grew young again; and, far from spoiling this rich melody, it explained and strengthened and guided it, as the dull and quavering voice of a skillful reader such as Andrieux extends the meaning of a sublime scene of Racine or Corneille by adding its own intimate poetry. This music, worthy of angels, revealed the treasures hidden in this vast opera, which could never be understood so long as its composer persisted in explaining the work in his current state of mind. Equally divided between the music and their surprise at this hundred-voiced instrument in which a stranger might have supposed a choir of invisible maidens was concealed, so close were the sounds to those made by the human voice, Marianna and the count dared not share their notions by word or expression. Marianna's face was illuminated by a magnificent glow of hope which restored the splendors of her youth. This rebirth of her beauty, united with the luminous apparition of her husband's genius, tinged the delights this mysterious hour afforded the count with a certain bitterness.

"You are our good angel," Marianna said to Andrea. "I am tempted to believe you inspire him, for I, who am always with him, have never heard anything like this."

"And Khadijah's farewell!" exclaimed Gambara, now singing the cavatina to which he had earlier given the epithet "sublime" and which made the two lovers in the room with him weep, so well did it express the loftiest realms of feeling.

"Who could inspire you with such music?" asked the count.

"The Spirit!" Gambara replied. "When it comes, everything around me seems to be on fire. I see melodies face-to-face, lovely and fresh, brilliant as flowers; they are radiant, they reverberate in my ears, but it takes an endless amount of time to reproduce them."

"Encore!" breathed Marianna.

Gambara, who felt no fatigue, played with neither grimaces nor strain. He performed his overture with such mastery and revealed musical qualities so original that the dazzled count finished by believing in an enchantment like that of Paganini or of Liszt, an execution which of course changes all the conditions of music, transforming it into a poetry beyond any musical creation.

"Well, *eccellenza*, can you cure him?" asked the chef when Andrea came downstairs.

"I shall soon know," replied the count. "This man's intellect has two windows, one closed to the world, the other open to heaven: the first is music, the second is poetry; to this day he has persisted in remaining at the sealed window, we must lead him to the other one. You put me on the right track, Giardini, when you told me your guest reasons better after a few glasses of wine."

"Yes," exclaimed the chef, "and I can guess your plan, *eccellenza*."

"If there's still time to make poetry ring in his ears, amid the chords of a splendid music, he must be put in a state to hear and to judge. As he is now, intoxication alone can come to my aid. Will you help me to manage this, my dear fellow—if it won't do any harm to yourself?"

"By which *vossignoria* means...?"

Andrea left without a reply, but smiling at the perspicacity the mad Neapolitan still possessed. The following day he came to call for Marianna, who had spent the morning preparing a simple but suitable dress which had consumed all her savings. This transformation might have dispelled the illusions of a worldly person, but the count's caprice had become a passion. Stripped of her poetic poverty and transformed into an ordinary bourgeoise, Marianna inspired him with thoughts of marriage; he gave her his

hand as she stepped into a fiacre and told her his plan. She approved of everything, delighted to find her lover even more generous, nobler, more disinterested than she had ever dared to hope. They arrived at an apartment where Andrea had taken pains to remind her of his presence by some of those elegant touches which beguile the most virtuous women.

"I shall not mention love to you until you despair of your Paolo," the count said to Marianna as they returned to the rue Froidmanteau. "You shall be witness to the sincerity of my efforts; if they are effective, I may not be able to resign myself to being merely your friend, but in that case I shall leave you, Marianna. I feel I have the courage to work for your happiness, but I may not have the strength to contemplate it."

"Do not say such things. Generosity has its dangers, too," she replied, on the verge of tears. "What—are you leaving so soon?"

"Yes," Andrea said. "Be happy without being distracted by me."

If the chef was to be believed, the change in regimen favored both husband and wife. Every evening after drinking, Gambara seemed less obsessed, conversed more often and more calmly; he even spoke of reading the newspapers. Andrea could not help trembling at the unhoped-for immediacy of his success; but although his anguish proved to him the strength of his love, it did nothing to sway his virtuous resolve. One day he came to judge the progress of this singular cure. If his patient's state initially caused him some joy, that same joy was troubled by Marianna's beauty, which the comfort of her new situation had restored to its former luster. Thereafter he came every evening to hold gentle and serious conversations with Gambara, to which he contributed the illumination of a measured opposition to the composer's singular theories. He took advantage of the marvelous lucidity of Gambara's mind on every point not too close to his obsessions to make him acknowledge the principles in all the branches of art which must ultimately be applicable to music as well. Everything proceeded splendidly as long as the fumes of wine warmed the composer's brain; but as soon as he was quite sober, or rather had again lost his reason, he relapsed into his manias. Nonetheless, Gambara was already allowing himself to be more easily distracted by impressions of the external world, and his intellect was becoming attached to a greater number of subjects at the same time. Andrea, who took an artist's interest in this semimedical project, believed that the time had come for a major effort. He decided to give a dinner at his own house, to which Giardini would be admitted (according to his principle of not separating the sublime from the ridiculous), on the evening of the first public performance of the opera *Robert le Diable*, of which he had already attended rehearsals and which seemed likely to disabuse the composer of his obsessions. By the second course Gambara, already drunk, was cracking jokes about his own theories, while Giardini declared that his culinary inventions could go to the devil for all he cared. Andrea had neglected no detail to bring about this double miracle. Bottles of Orvieto and Montefiascone, brought with the infinite precautions their transportation requires, of Lacrima-Christi and Giro—all the precious wines of the *cara patria*—soon wrought these excitable brains to the double intoxication of the grape and of memory. By the dessert course, both composer and chef gaily renounced their errors: the former hummed a cavatina by Rossini, the latter piled pastry on his plate and sprinkled it with maraschino in honor of *la cuisine française.* The count took advantage of Gambara's happy mood to invite him to the Opéra, to which he let himself be led as meekly as a lamb. At the first notes of the overture, Gambara's intoxication seemed to give way to that feverish excitement which sometimes set his judgment and his imagination in harmony, their habitual discord no doubt being responsible for his madness; and the dominant thought of this great musical drama struck him, in its dazzling simplicity, as a lightningflash piercing the darkness in which he lived. To his receptive ears, this music created the vast horizons of a world where he found himself cast adrift for the first time, while recognizing accidents there which he had already envisioned in his dreams. He believed himself transported to his native region, on the borders of *la bella Italia*, which Napoleon so astutely named the glacis of the Alps. Delivered by memory to the days when his young and lively intellect was not yet troubled by the ecstasies of his over-rich imagination, he listened with reverent attention, reluctant to utter a single word. The count respected the inner labors being performed within this soul. Until half past midnight, Gambara sat so profoundly motionless that the habitués of the Opéra took him for what he was, a man intoxicated. On the way home, Andrea proceeded to attack Meyerbeer's work in order to awaken Gambara, who remained plunged in the torpor of inebriation.

"What's so magnetic about this incoherent score that it makes you behave like a sleepwalker?" Andrea asked when they reached the house. "The subject of *Robert le Diable* is interesting, I'll admit. Holtei has treated it with rare felicity in a well-written play filled with strong and moving situations; yet the French authors have managed to turn it into the silliest story in the world. Never have the absurdities of Vesari's or Schikaneder's libretti equaled the preposterousness of Scribe's poem for *Robert le Diable*, a real dramatic nightmare which oppresses the spectator without giving birth to any strong emotions. Meyerbeer has given his devil too fine a part. Bertram and Alice represent the struggle between good and evil, and this

antagonism offered the composer the most attractive contrast. The sweetest melodies placed side by side with harsh and cruel arias were a natural consequence of the libretto's form, but in Meyerbeer's score the demons sing better than the saints. Heavenly inspirations frequently belie their origin, and if the composer leaves the infernal for a moment, he's all the more eager to get back, quickly exhausted by his efforts to abandon it. Melody, that golden thread which in so vast a composition must never break, often vanishes in Meyerbeer's work. Sentiment counts for nothing here, and the heart plays no part whatever; hence we never encounter those happy motifs, those naïve songs which waken our sympathies and leave a sweet impression deep within the soul. Here harmony reigns supreme instead of being the background against which the groups of the musical picture are to stand out. These dissonant chords, far from moving the listener, merely excite in his soul a sentiment analogous to what we might feel at the sight of an acrobat dangling from a rope and swaying between life and death. No charming songs ever calm these wearisome tensions. It is as if the composer had no other goal than to appear fantastic, bizarre; he eagerly seizes the occasion to produce eccentric effects, with no concern for truth or musical unity or the weakness of voices drowned out by the instrumental uproar."

"Say no more, my friend," Gambara protested. "I am still under the charm of that wonderful song from the infernal regions which megaphones, a new instrumentation, make still more terrible! The broken cadences which give such energy to Robert's aria, the cavatina in the fourth act, the finale of the first still keep me under the spell of a supernatural power! No, the declamation of Glück himself had no such prodigious effect, and I'm dazzled by so much scientific skill."

"Signor maestro," said Andrea, smiling, "permit me to contradict you. Glück, before composing, reflected a great deal. He calculated every likelihood and established a plan which could later be modified by his inspirations of detail, but which never let him stray from his path. Hence that energetic accentuation, that declamation pulsing with truth. I agree with you that the scientific skill is great in Meyerbeer's opera, but such science becomes a defect when it is separated from inspiration, and I believe I hear in this work the painful labor of a fine mind which has fashioned its music out of thousands of motifs from failed or forgotten operas, appropriating them by strengthening their weaknesses, by concentrating their strengths. But what has happened is what happens to all composers of a cento: too much of a good thing. This skillful gleaner of notes lavishes dissonances which, being too frequent, end by wounding the ear and habituating it to those great effects which the composer must apply very sparingly, in order to derive the greatest benefit from them when the situation requires them. Here the enharmonic transitions are repeated to satiety, and the abuse of the plagal cadence spoils a great part of the religious solemnity. I'm well aware that each composer has his particular forms to which he returns in spite of himself, but it is essential to be attentive to what one is doing and to avoid this defect. A picture in which the color scheme offered only blue or red would be far from the truth and would fatigue the eye. Thus the rhythm which is almost always the same throughout *Robert le Diable* makes the entire score rather monotonous. As for the effect of the megaphones you speak of, it was used long ago in Germany, and what Meyerbeer gives us as novelty was employed by Mozart, who made the chorus of devils in *Don Giovanni* sing in this fashion."

Andrea tried, while constantly proffering new libations, to make Gambara refute him and thus return to his true musical sentiments, proving that his authentic mission in this world consisted not in regenerating an art beyond his faculties but in seeking the expression of his thought in another form, which was none other than poetry.

"My dear count, you have failed to understand this great musical drama," Gambara said quite casually, as he went over to Andrea's piano, tried the keys, listened to their tone, and sat pensively for a few seconds, as though to gather his thoughts.

"First of all," Gambara continued, "you must realize that an intelligence trained as mine has been recognizes at once the jeweler's craft of which you speak. Yes, this music is a sort of loving anthology, but selected from the treasures of a fruitful imagination in which science has compressed ideas in order to extract a musical essence. I shall explain this undertaking to you."

He stood up to move the candles to the adjoining room, and before sitting back down, he drank a full glass of Giro, that Sardinian wine which contains as much fire as ever flared up in the old Tokays.

"The fact of the matter is," Gambara said, "that this music was written neither for unbelievers nor for those incapable of love. If you haven't experienced in your own life the vigorous assaults of an evil spirit who wrecks the very thing you seek, who brings the fairest hopes to a sad conclusion—in a word, if you've never glimpsed the devil's tail wriggling in this world of ours, this opera *Robert le Diable* will be for you what the Apocalypse is for those who believe the world comes to an end when they do. If on the other hand, in your misery and suffering, you understand something of the genius of evil, that great monkey which constantly destroys the works of God, if you conceive him as having not loved but violated a nearly divine woman, and from that as achieving the joys of fatherhood, to the point of loving his son in eternal

misery with himself, rather than knowing him eternally blessed with God—if you conceive, finally, the mother's soul soaring over her son's head in order to wrest him from his father's dreadful seductions, you'll have merely a faint idea of this vast poem which ranks with Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. *Don Giovanni*, I grant you, is superior in its perfection; *Robert le Diable* represents ideas, *Don Giovanni* excites sensations. *Don Giovanni* is still the only musical work in which harmony and melody are in exactly equal proportions; this is the sole secret of its superiority to *Robert le Diable*, for Meyerbeer's work is the more abundant. But what use are such comparisons, if each of these two works possesses a beauty all its own? To me, groaning under the devil's repeated assaults, *Robert le Diable* has spoken more energetically than it has to you, and I have found it to be both vast and concentrated. Truly, thanks to you, I have been, this evening, inhabiting the world of dreams where our senses become more powerful, where the universe reveals itself in gigantic proportions in relation to mankind." There was a moment of silence. "I still shudder," said the unfortunate artist, "at the four measures of the kettledrums which pierced me to the core at the opening of that brief overture where the trombone solo, the flutes, the oboes, and the clarinet flood the soul with fantastic colors. That andante in C-minor foreshadows the theme of the invocation of souls in the abbey, and magnifies the scene by its announcement of an entirely spiritual struggle. I shuddered!"

Gambara struck the keys with a firm hand and masterfully developed Meyerbeer's theme by a sort of spiritual explosion in the manner of Franz Liszt. It was no longer a piano but a whole orchestra that was playing—the genius of music was evoked.

"That is the style of Mozart!" he cried. "You see how this German handles chords, and through what learned modulations he transforms terror to reach the dominant of C. I hear Hell in it! The curtain rises. What do I see? The only spectacle deserving of the name *infernal*, an orgy of knights, in Sicily. And here, in this chorus in F, all human passions unchained by a bacchic allegro. All the strings by which the devil leads us are stirred! This is the joy men know when, yielding to vertigo, they dance over an abyss. What movement in that chorus! The reality of life, life naïve and homely, stands out in G-minor in Raimbaut's simple song. How this fellow refreshes my soul, if only for a moment, when he reminds the drunken Robert of green Normandy. The sweetness of the beloved homeland runs like a golden thread through this somber opening. Then comes that marvelous ballad in C-major, accompanied by the chorus in C-minor, taking up the narration until 'I am Robert!' bursts forth. The rage of the prince offended by his vassal is already more than a natural emotion; but it calms down, for memories of childhood return with Alice in that allegro in A-major, so full of movement and grace. Can you hear the cries of that innocence which in this infernal drama is persecuted from the start? 'No, no!'" sang Gambara, making the piano echo his straining voice. "His native land and memories of his youth bloom once more in Robert's heart—his mother's shade appears, accompanied by gentle religious meditations! Religion inspires that beautiful ballad in E-major with its marvelous harmonic and melodic progression on the words:

> 'For in the heavens, as on earth,
> His mother prays for him.'

Then begins the struggle between the unknown powers and the one man who resists them with all the fires of hell. To understand it, you must listen to Bertram's entrance, which the great composer accompanies by an orchestral ritornello echoing Raimbaut's ballad. What art! What unity in all the parts, what power of construction! A wriggling devil is hidden underneath. With Alice's terror, as she recognizes the devil of her own village of Saint-Michel, the combat of the two principles is launched. The musical theme is developed —and by what varied phases! Here is the antagonism necessary to any opera, powerfully revealed by a splendid recitative between Bertram and Robert, like the kind Glück composed:

> 'Never shall you know the powers of my love.'

"That diabolical C-minor, Bertram's terrible bass which begins to undermine and ultimately destroy every effort of this man of violent temper. To me, this whole part of the score is terrifying. Must crime have its criminal, and the executioner his prey? Will disaster consume the artist's genius? Will disease overcome its victim? Can the guardian angel save the Christian? Then comes the finale, the gambling scene in which Bertram torments his son, arousing terrible emotions. Robert, despoiled, furious, destroying everything in sight, seeking to murder everyone with fire and sword, seems indeed his son so like him at this moment. What cruel gaiety in Bertram's 'I laugh at your blows!' And what lurid colors the Venetian barcarole casts on this finale! What bold transitions bring this criminal father back onstage to drag Robert to the gaming table! This beginning is overwhelming for anyone who can develop the themes in his own heart, granting them the scope the composer has compelled them to communicate. There was nothing but love to set against this great symphony of voices—in which the same means are never used twice: it is unified yet

varied, which is the characteristic of everything great and natural. I breathe freely; I inhabit the elevated region of a chivalrous court. I hear Isabelle's lovely, melancholy phrases, and the double chorus of women echoing each other, reminiscent, perhaps, of the Moorish accents of Spain. At this point the terrible music is sweetened by mellower tones, like a calming storm, until we hear that graceful, flowery duet, so carefully modulated, which has no counterpart in the preceding music. After the tumult of the heroes' camp and the adventurers' uproar comes this picture of love. My gratitude, poet, for my heart couldn't have held out much longer! If I didn't gather the wildflowers of a French *opéra comique*, if I couldn't hear the gentle laughter of a woman who can love and console, then I couldn't endure the terrible dark notes of Bertram's reappearance, answering his son with that 'If I permit it!' when he promises his adored princess to triumph with the weapons she gives him. To the hope of the gambler reformed by love, the love of the most beautiful woman—for such is this ravishing Sicilian maiden, her falcon's eyes so sure of her prey! What performers this composer has found! To this man's hopes, Hell opposes its own in that sublime cry: 'Beware, Robert of Normandy!' How could you help but admire the grim horror that fills those long, splendid notes of 'in the nearby forest'? All the enchantment of *Jerusalem Delivered* is in them, as all of chivalry is in that chorus with its Spanish rhythm and in the tempo di marcia. Not to mention the originality of that allegro, the modulation of the four kettledrums (tuned to C, D, and C, G) combined with the grace of the tournament fanfare! All the movement of the heroic life of the age is there; you feel it in your soul, at once a romance of chivalry and a poem. The exposition is over, the music's resources seem to be exhausted, you've heard nothing like it, and yet all is homogenous. You have seen human life in its one and only true expression: Shall I be happy or unhappy? Ask the philosophers. Shall I be damned or saved? Ask the Christians."

Here Gambara ended on the chorus's final note, drawing it out in a melancholy chord, and stood to pour himself another full glass of Giro. This semi-African wine rekindled his countenance, which the impassioned performance of Meyerbeer's score had turned somewhat ashen.

"And that there be nothing lacking in this composition," he continued, "the great artist has generously given us the one comic duet which the devil could afford: the temptation of a poor troubadour. He sets the jest beside the horror, a jest which destroys the only reality that appears in the sublime fantasy of his work: the pure and tranquil love of Alice and Raimbaut, whose life will be troubled by anticipated vengeance. Only a great soul can feel the nobility which inspires these delicate melodies; they have neither the garishness of our Italian music nor the vulgarity of Parisian street ballads. They have a kind of Olympian majesty. We hear the bitter laughter of a divinity set against the surprise of a troubadour—a troubadour as *Don Juan*! If it were not for this greatness at this point, we should return all too abruptly to the opera's pervasive color, marked by that horrible rage in diminished sevenths, resolved in an infernal waltz which brings us face-to-face with the demons at last. With what vigor Bertram's verses stand out in B-minor from the infernal chorus depicting that fatherly feeling which in these demonic songs mingles with a dreadful despair! Then the ravishing transition to Alice's arrival with the ritornello in B-flat! I can still hear those angelic songs of heavenly freshness—the nightingale after the storm! You hear the grand conception of the ensemble in every detail, for how could we withstand the devils swarming in their pit were it not for Alice's marvelous aria:

'When I set out from Normandy!'

"The golden thread of that melody continues throughout the entire length of the powerful harmony—it is like a heavenly hope, and with what profound skill it keeps returning! Genius never releases the guidelines of science. Here Alice's song in B-flat is united with the F-sharp dominant of the infernal chorus. Can you hear the orchestra's tremolo when Robert is summoned to the council of demons? Bertram comes onstage here, and this is the high point of the musical interest, a recitative comparable to anything the greatest masters have devised, the intense struggle in E-flat between the two athletes, Heaven and Hell, the one with its 'Yes, you know me now!' on a diminished seventh, the other with its sublime 'Heaven is with me!' in F. Hell and the Cross are in each other's presence here. Then come Bertram's threats to Alice, so violent and touching, the genius of evil revealing itself so readily and prevailing, as always, by an appeal to self-interest. Robert's entrance, which brings us to the magnificent unaccompanied trio in A-flat, establishes a first engagement between the two rival forces for possession of the man. You see how explicitly this is expressed," Gambara observed, synopsizing the scene with an impassioned execution which thrilled Andrea. "This whole avalanche of music, from the four-four time of the kettledrums, has made for this combat of the three voices. The magic of evil triumphs! Alice flees, and we hear the duet in D between Bertram and Robert, the devil sinking his claws into Robert's heart, lacerating it all the more fiercely to seize it for his own, making use of everything: honor, hope, infinite and eternal delights—everything is made to glow before his eyes; as he did with Jesus, he sets Robert on the pinnacle of the temple and shows him the

treasures of the earth, evil's jewel casket. He tests his courage, and the man's noblest feelings explode in this cry:

'To the knights of my country
Honor was ever their guide!'

"And to crown the work, here is the theme with which the opera began so fatally, the principal song in that magnificent evocation of souls:

'Hear me, you Nuns, asleep
Beneath this marble slab?'

"Gloriously sustained, the music ends with the allegro vivace of the bacchanal in D-minor. It is Hell which triumphs! The music rolls out, enveloping us in its seductive folds. The infernal powers have seized their prey; they hold him fast and dance around him. Behold him lost, this noble genius, born to conquer and to reign! The devils are merry, poverty stifles genius, passion will destroy the knight."

Here Gambara worked up a variation of the bacchanal for his own purposes, improvising ingenious variations and accompanying himself with a mournful voice, as though to express his own intimate sufferings.

"Do you hear the heavenly laments of neglected love?" he continued. "Isabelle calls to Robert amid the great chorus of the knights entering the tournament, in which motifs of the second act reappear, so we can see how the third act concludes in a supernatural atmosphere. Real life resumes. This chorus subsides at the approach of Hell's seductions, represented by Robert with the talisman, and the wonders of the third act will continue. Here we have the duet between tenor and violin, where the rhythm indicates the brutalities of an omnipotent man, and where the princess, by plaintive moans, tries to recall her lover to reason. The composer has put himself in a difficult situation here, and has triumphed by the most delicious piece in the whole opera. What an adorable melody in the cavatina 'Mercy for you!' Every woman has understood its meaning, for all saw themselves embraced and ravished onstage. This piece alone would make the opera's fortune, for every woman has fancied herself at grips with some violent knight. There was never such passionate, such dramatic music. Then the whole world turns against the reprobate. We might find fault with this finale for its similarity to that of *Don Giovanni*, but there is this enormous difference in the situation: Isabelle is inspired by a noble faith, a true love which will save Robert; for he scornfully repulses the infernal power confided to him, while Don Giovanni persists in his unbelief. This reproach, moreover, is one that can be made to all composers who have written finales since Mozart. The finale of *Don Giovanni* is one of those classical forms composed for all time. At the very end, religion ascends omnipotent with a voice which overwhelms the world, summoning all miseries to console them, all repentances to reconcile them. The entire audience is stirred by the accents of this chorus:

'Wretched or guilty men,
Hasten to approach!'

"In the horrible tumult of unchained passions, no holy voice would have been heard; but at this critical moment, it is the voice of the divine Catholic Church that rings forth, rising effulgent above all the rest. Here I was amazed to find, after so many harmonic treasures, that the composer devised a new vein for the splendid number *Glory unto Providence*, written in the manner of Handel. Robert enters, lacerating our souls with his 'If I could only pray!' Impelled by Hell's decrees, Bertram pursues his son and makes a final effort. Alice comes to reveal the mother, and then we hear the great trio toward which the whole opera has been moving: the triumph of the soul over matter, of the spirit of good over the spirit of evil. The songs of faith disperse the evil choruses; joy is transcendent, but here the music weakens: I see a cathedral rather than hearing the concert of euphoric angels, some divine prayer of delivered souls applauding the union of Robert and Isabelle. We must not remain under the weight of Hell's enchantments; we need to emerge with hope in our hearts. As a Catholic composer, I needed another prayer from Moses. I'd like to know how Germany would have contended with Italy, what Meyerbeer would have done to compete with Rossini. Yet despite this minor defect, the composer might point out that after five hours of music so substantial as this, Parisians prefer a flourish to a masterpiece! You've heard the cheers this work has received—it will have five hundred performances. If the French have understood this music..."

"It's because it presents ideas," the count interrupted.

"No, it's because it offers—and with what authority!—the image of struggles in which so many perish, and because each individual existence is drawn to it by the memory of its own experience. And I, wretched

as I am, I'd have been satisfied to hear those celestial voices I've dreamed of so often."

At this moment Gambara fell into a sort of musical ecstasy and began to improvise the most melodic and harmonious cavatina Andrea had ever heard, a divine song divinely sung, the theme of which had a grace comparable to that of the *O filii et filiae*, but filled with delights only the highest musical genius could devise. The count remained plunged in intense admiration: the clouds dispersed, the blue of the sky reappeared, figures of angels appeared and raised the veils which hid the sanctuary, the light of heaven fell in floods. Soon silence reigned. Andrea, startled to hear nothing more, stared at Gambara who, his eyes fixed and his body rigid, breathed a single word: *God!* The count waited until the composer descended from the enchanted realms to which he had mounted on the iridescent wings of inspiration, and resolved to enlighten him with the very illumination he had brought down with him.

"Well now," he said, offering Gambara another full glass and toasting him with his own, "you see that this German has created, as you say, a sublime opera without concerning himself about theory, while the composers who write grammars of their art like literary critics are quite capable of being detestable musicians."

"Then...you don't like my music?"

"I say no such thing, but if instead of seeking to express ideas, and if instead of carrying musical principles to extremes, in which you lose sight of your goal, you were simply willing to awaken certain sensations, you would be better understood—unless in fact you have mistaken your vocation altogether. You are a great poet."

"So!" cried Gambara. "Twenty-five years of study in vain! You would have me study the imperfect language of men, when I hold the key to the *Celestial Word*! Oh, if you were right, I would rather die..."

"You? No. You are great and strong; you will begin your life again, and I shall sustain you. We will present to the world the rare and noble alliance of a rich man and an artist who understand each other."

"Do you really mean it?" asked Gambara, struck with a sudden stupor.

"As I've already told you, you're more of a poet than a musician."

"Poet! Poet! That's better than nothing. Tell me the truth, whom do you prize more, Homer or Mozart?"

"I admire them equally."

"Word of honor?"

"Word of honor."

"Hmm...One word more. What do you think of Meyerbeer and Byron?"

"By naming them together in that fashion, you've judged them."

The count's carriage was at the door. The composer and his noble physician were driven in a few moments to Gambara's new lodgings; they hurried up the stairs and in another moment were in Marianna's presence. As he burst in, Gambara threw himself into his wife's arms. As he did, Marianna stepped back and turned her head aside; her husband did the same, leaning toward the count.

"Ah, monsieur," Gambara said in a hollow voice, "at least you might have left me my madness." Then his head dropped, and he fell to the floor.

"What have you done?" cried Marianna, giving her husband's body a glance in which pity struggled with disgust. "He's dead drunk!"

The count, with the help of his footman, gathered Gambara in his arms and laid him on his bed. Andrea left, his heart filled with a dreadful joy.

The next day the count deliberately let the usual time of his visit go by; he was beginning to fear that he had duped himself and paid too dearly for the comfort of that wretched household, its peace now forever troubled.

Presently Giardini appeared, bringing a note from Marianna. "Come," she had written, "the damage is not so great as you would have liked, cruel man!"

"*Eccellenza*," said the chef, while Andrea was dressing to go out, "you were a magnificent host last night, but you must agree that apart from the wines, which were splendid, your maître d'hôtel served no single dish worthy to figure on the table of a true gourmet. And you won't deny, I suppose, that the viands you were served in my house the day you did me the honor of sitting at my table were infinitely better than any of those which sullied your magnificent silver service last night. Hence this morning I awoke thinking of the promise you had made me of a chef's position. I now consider myself as attached to your household."

"The same thought occurred to me some days ago," replied Andrea. "I had mentioned you to the secretary of the Austrian Embassy, and you may henceforth cross the Alps whenever you choose to do so. I have a castle in Croatia which I seldom visit, and there you may combine the functions of concierge, wine steward, and maître d'hôtel on a salary of two hundred écus. This same emolument will be paid to your wife, who will tend to the rest of the household service. You may perform your culinary experiments *in anima vili*, which is to say, on the stomachs of my vassals. Here is a check on my bank for your traveling

expenses."

Giardini kissed the count's hands, as is the Neapolitan custom.

"*Eccellenza*," he said, "I accept the check without accepting the situation you offer, as it would be a dishonor to myself to abandon my art, declining the verdict of the finest gourmets, who are without a doubt those right here in Paris."

When Andrea finally arrived at Gambara's apartment, the composer rose and came to meet him.

"My generous friend," he said with the most open expression, "either you took advantage of the weakness of my constitution yesterday in order to play a trick on me, or else your own brain is no more proof than mine against the vapors of our good Latian wines. I prefer this latter supposition, for I should rather doubt your stomach than your heart. Whatever the case, I forever renounce the frequentation of wine, whose abuse led me the other night into many blameworthy follies. When I think that I nearly..." Here he darted an apprehensive glance at Marianna. "As for the wretched opera you obliged me to listen to, I have given the matter some thought. It is no more than music produced by the most ordinary means, no more than mountains of notes heaped up, *verba et voces*: the dregs of that ambrosia which I quaff in deep draughts as I create the celestial music it is given to me to hear. I have recognized the origin of those mangled phrases. The man's *Glory unto Providence* is a little too like a piece by Handel; the chorus of knights riding to battle is closely related to the Scottish tune in *La Dame blanche*; and if indeed the opera pleases as much as it appears to do, it is because the music derives from anyone and everyone, hence its popularity. I must leave you, dear friend, since this morning my head is filled with ideas which seek only to ascend toward God on the wings of music; but I wanted to see you, to speak to you. Farewell! I go to ask pardon of the muse. We shall dine together this evening, but no wine, not for me at least. Oh yes, I am quite determined..."

"I despair of him," Andrea said, blushing.

"Ah! You reassure my conscience," exclaimed Marianna. "I dared not question it further. My friend! My friend! It is no fault of ours, he does not want to be cured."

Six years later, in January 1837, many musicians unlucky enough to have damaged their wind or string instruments would bring them to a dilapidated and disreputable house in the rue Froidmanteau, on the fifth floor of which lived an old Italian named Gambara. For the last five years, this artist had lived alone, abandoned by his wife and subject to many misfortunes. A musical instrument which he had counted on to make his fortune, and which he called the panharmonicon, had been sold by the bailiffs at public auction on the Place du Châtelet, together with great quantities of ruled paper covered with musical notations. The day after the sale these scores had been used in Les Halles to wrap butter, fish, and fruit. In this way three grand operas, of which this poor man used to speak but which a former Neapolitan cook (now a huckster of questionable groceries) declared to be a heap of rubbish, had been scattered throughout Paris and used to line the wicker baskets of secondhand peddlers. In any case, the landlord had received his rent and the bailiff's men their pay. According to the old Neapolitan huckster, who sold the whores of the rue Froidmanteau the leftovers of the most sumptuous dinners given in town the night before, Signora Gambara had followed a Milanese count to Italy, and no one could say what had become of her. Weary of fifteen years of poverty, perhaps she had ruined this count by her extravagance, for they were so much in love with each other that in all his life the Neapolitan had never seen an example of such a passion.

One evening toward the end of that same month of January, when Giardini the huckster was telling a whore who had come to find something for her supper about this divine Marianna, so pure, so lovely, so nobly devoted, *and who nevertheless had ended up like all the others*, the whore and the huckster and Signora Giardini noticed in the street a tall woman with a dusty, blackened face, a walking skeleton peering at the street numbers as she passed, evidently trying to recognize a house.

"*Ecco la Marianna!*" said the huckster in Italian.

In the wretched huckster, Marianna recognized the Neapolitan Giardini. Showing no concern for whatever misfortunes had brought him to this wretched state, she entered the place and sat down, for she had walked from Fontainebleau; indeed the poor woman had walked fourteen leagues that day, and had begged her bread from Turin all the way to Paris. The sight of her dismayed this wretched trio. Of her marvelous beauty nothing was left but her lovely eyes, now sick and lusterless. The only thing that had remained faithful to her was misfortune. She was warmly welcomed by the old instrument mender, who saw her enter his room with inexpressible pleasure.

"Here you are then, my poor Marianna!" he said kindly. "While you were gone, *they* sold my instrument and my operas, too!"

It was difficult to kill the fatted calf for the prodigal's return, but Giardini produced some leftover salmon, the whore paid for the wine, Gambara offered his bread, Signora Giardini laid the cloth, and in this fashion these poor wretches supped together in the composer's attic. When questioned about her

adventures, Marianna refused to answer and merely raised her fine eyes to heaven, murmuring to Giardini: "...married to a dancing girl!"

"How are you going to live?" asked the whore. "The journey has done you in, and..."

"Made me an old woman," said Marianna. "No, it's not exhaustion, and it's not poverty either. It's grief."

"Now then, what's that?" asked the whore. "And why didn't you send anything to your man here?"

Marianna replied with no more than a look, but it was a look that went straight to the poor girl's heart.

"And proud into the bargain!" the whore exclaimed. "Excuse me! What good will that do her?" she murmured to Giardini.

That year, musicians must have taken exceptional care of their instruments, for repairs did not suffice to pay the expenses of this wretched household; Marianna earned little enough by her needle, and the couple was reduced to employing their talents in the lowest of all spheres. They left the rue Froidmanteau at dusk and walked to the Champs-Elysées in order to sing duets which poor Gambara accompanied on an even poorer guitar. On the way, his wife, who on these expeditions covered her head with a muslin rag, led her husband to a wineshop in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré and made him drink several little glasses of brandy, enough to intoxicate him—otherwise his music would have been intolerable. Then they took up their positions in front of the gay world sitting on iron chairs along the promenade, where one of the great geniuses of the age, the unknown Orpheus of modern music, performed fragments of his scores, and these fragments were so remarkable that they won the favor of a few coins from the Parisian idlers. When an amateur of the Théâtre des Bouffons who happened to be sitting there failed to recognize the opera from which these pieces were taken, he questioned the woman dressed like a Grecian priestess who was making the rounds with an old tin plate in which she collected alms.

"My dear, where does that music come from?"

"From the opera *Mohammed*," replied Marianna.

Since Rossini had composed an opera called *Mohammed II*, the amateur then observed to the woman standing beside him: "What a pity they don't put on some of those operas of Rossini at the Italiens—the ones nobody knows. It certainly is glorious music!"

Gambara smiled.

A few days ago, the wretched sum of thirty-six francs was required for the rent of the attic where the poor couple lived. The wineshop would advance no credit for the brandy with which the wife intoxicated her husband to make him play properly. Gambara's music then became so insufferable that the ears of the rich were offended, and the tin plate came back empty. It was nine in the evening when a lovely Italian woman, the Principessa Massimilla di Varese, took pity on these poor wretches. She gave them forty francs and asked them questions when she discovered from the wife's thanks that she was Venetian. Prince Emilio, who accompanied his wife, asked for the story of their misfortunes, which Marianna told without complaint against man or God.

"Madame," said Gambara, who was not the least bit drunk, "we are the victims of our own superiority. My music is beautiful, but when music passes from sensation to idea, it can have listeners only among people of genius, for they alone have the power to develop its meaning. My misfortune comes from listening to the music of angels and from believing that human beings could understand it. The same is true of women when their love assumes divine forms—men no longer understand them."

These words were worth at least the forty francs the princess had just bestowed, and she drew from her purse another gold piece, saying as she gave it to Marianna that she would write to Andrea Marcosini.

"Do not write to him, madame," Marianna said, "and may God keep you beautiful forever."

"We must look after them," the princess murmured to her husband, "for this man has remained faithful to the ideal we have killed."

At the sight of the gold piece, old Gambara wept; then a memory of his former scientific labors returned, and as he wiped away his tears, the poor composer uttered a sentence which the occasion made quite touching: "Water," he said, "is a burnt substance."

—Paris, June 1837

This is a New York Review Book
Published by The New York Review of Books
435 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014
www.nyrb.com

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Cover image: Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, *Odalisque with Slave* (detail), 1842
Cover design: Katy Homans

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Balzac, Honoré de, 1799–1850.
[Chef d'œuvre inconnu. English]
The unknown masterpiece ; and, Gambara / by Honoré de Balzac ;
translated by Richard Howard ; introduction by Arthur C. Danto.
p. cm.
I. Title: Unknown masterpiece ; and, Gambara. II. Howard, Richard,
1929– III. Balzac, Honoré de, 1799–1850. Gambara. English. IV. Title:
Gambara. V. Title.
PQ2163.C4 E5 2001
843'.7—dc21
2001000399

eISBN 978-1-59017-415-9
v1.0

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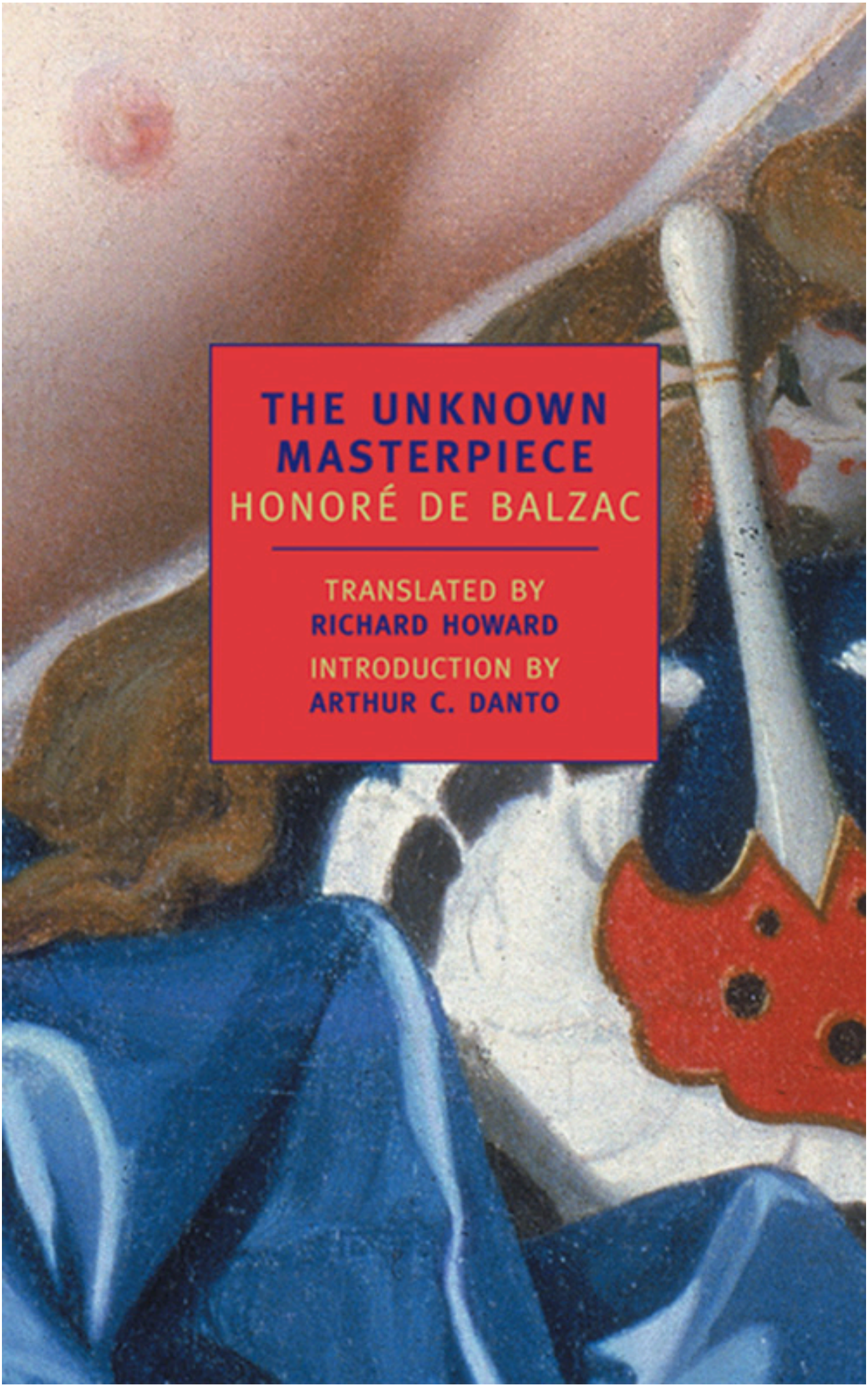
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HONORÉ DE BALZAC
TRANSLATED BY
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INTRODUCTION BY
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